

Disclaimer: Not my usual fare, but fun to write.

## Hogwarts' Lost Class

"Well isn't that a sight for sore eyes."

A smile bloomed on Hermione's face and she turned with a look of anticipation. "Harry?"

"The same," he agreed.

"I'm so glad you came," Hermione said happily. "It's been what . . . seven years?"

"Close to eight," Harry replied. "I figured this reunion would be small enough without me missing it."

"You know what they call us?"

"Hmmm?"

"Hogwarts' lost class," Hermione said. "They even folded the year above us and the year under us into it."

"Not many classes have survivors rather then graduates," Harry mused. "Who's showed up?"

"Luna, Susan, Dean, Neville . . ."

"Neville?" Harry interrupted. "So he's . . ."

"The same," Hermione said sadly. "No change, they put him in a bed next to his parents."

"Why's he here?"

"The Healers thought it might do some good to have him around familiar faces," she explained.

"Did it?"

"No," she sighed. "Not that I could tell."

"Did they bring Ron?" he asked, fearing the answer.

"No." Hermione shook her head. "No point, there isn't any hope that he'll come back. They're only keeping his body alive for Molly. Ron's dead, his heart just doesn't know it."

"He never did know when to quit . . . dumb bastard."

"Yeah."

"So what have you been doing with yourself?" Harry asked to break the silence. "Aside from being the youngest Charms Professor in two centuries."

"Two and a half," Hermione said with mock arrogance. "And the youngest Deputy in four."

"Deputy Headmistress too?" Harry said with a grin. "I'm impressed."

"Hello Hermione," Luna said as she walked up. "Harry, I'm surprised to see you here . . . considering."

"Considering what?" Hermione asked.

"Considering that I'm the lead suspect in several murders," Harry said calmly. "And because Luna here is an Auror."

"Murders?"

"You didn't hear?" Luna asked. "Someone hunted down every 'alleged' Death Eater that escaped prosecution."

"Didn't wonder why you haven't seen Malfoy?" Harry said with a shrug. "Took them three years to get them all."

"And the majority of them died very nasty deaths," from Luna's tone of voice she could have been talking about the weather. "Harry here is the lead suspect."

"They say it took poor Draco three days to die," Harry mused. "Someone wasn't happy about what he did to Ginny."

"How'd you hear that?" Luna asked. "The three days thing I mean."

"When you're the 'Boy-Who-Lived' and the 'Slayer-Of-Voldemort' people tell you things," Harry replied. "I think it's because of the hyphens."

"That must be it," Luna agreed. "Did anyone tell you things about the possible fate of Umbridge and Fudge?"

"I thought Umbitch committed suicide?" Harry asked.

"She picked a particularly slow and painful way to do it then," Luna giggled.

"Let me put it this way," Harry began. "So far as I know she committed suicide."

"Oh . . . thank you Harry, and Fudge?"

"Drained every account he could and fled to Bermuda," Harry said. "To retire to the sandy beaches."

"Thank you again Harry," Luna said serenely. "I'll have to pay him a visit."

"Assigned to the Fudge case?"

"Hmmm . . . yes, why do you ask?"

"Because the only way he's coming back here is in a box," Harry responded. "Seems that someone broke into his villa and set him on fire. They did all they could, but he died in the hospital one week later. So sad."

"You always did know how to hold a grudge Harry," Luna laughed.

"What are you doing with yourself Harry?" Hermione asked to change the subject.

"I kill people," Harry said bluntly. "If a country has a blossoming Dark Lord they call me and I take care of the problem."

"Enthusiastically and cheerfully," Luna chirped.

"What can I say? I love my job . . . sides, it was the only thing I've ever been really good at. Dumbledore dedicated his life to bringing peace to the magical world, I like to think I'm continuing his work."

"I doubt that Dumbledore would have agreed with your methods Harry," Luna said dryly.

"Different men, different methods."

"There are better ways to bring peace to the world Harry," Hermione said calmly.

"Dumbledore's way brought us to the point where we barely have a sustainable population," Harry pointed out. "Mine seems to be working much better."

"I didn't say I disagreed with you," Hermione replied. "Just that there were better ways."

"Like what?"

"You'll find out if my project is successful," Hermione retorted. "Seven years of work, I started right after you left last time."

"What's this mysterious project then?" Susan asked as she walked up to the group.

"Terribly mysterious," Hermione replied. "How do you like the Department of Mysteries?"

"I'd tell you . . ."

"But you'd have to kill us," the rest of the group chorused.

"But it would bore you to tears," Susan corrected. "My department has a cool name, but spell development and research aren't the things adventures make."

"I notice you're getting around better then you used to," Harry commented. "Did they . . ."

"No, I've just gotten used to the prosthetics. Two legs isn't too bad a price to get through the war, considering what happened to some of us."

"Yeah," Harry agreed. "So . . ."

"So . . ." The group looked at each other , all trying to find something to break the awkward silence.

"Could I have a few hairs from each of you?" Hermione blurted. "And some blood if possible?"

"Why?"

"That project I mentioned earlier," Hermione said. "I swear to you that I have no reason to believe that it will harm any of you . . . or me."

"What is this project?" Harry demanded, there was a time when he would have provided Hermione with whatever she asked without question. Then again there was also a time that he wouldn't have been able to skin a man alive, sadly both times had passed.

"I've done the numbers," Hermione began. "Thanks in part to Harry's efforts, the United Kingdom's magical population is no longer at sustainable levels. This years graduating class will be larger then ours but . . ."

"But you can count ours on two hands," Harry said with a nod. "Fingers left over if you don't count Neville and Ron."

"There are things we could do to keep our numbers up," Hermione continued. "But none of the . . . palatable methods would leave our culture intact."

"Are you sure that's a bad thing?" Susan asked. "Look what our culture has brought us."

"It's a valid point," Hermione allowed. "But at best it's a side issue, it's not important enough for me to worry about."

"So what's this plan of yours?"

"Have you ever wondered what it would be like to go back?" Hermione asked suddenly. "To change the past?"

"Every day," Susan said quickly. "But it's impossible, you can't change time."

"Not with a time turner," Hermione said with a grin. "You can send your personality back and you can change the past. I've already successfully tested it and it works."

"What?"

"We spent a normal night catching up with each other," Hermione said. "The party broke up around midnight and we all agreed to keep in touch but as of two months later none of us except Susan and I have said a word to one another. I had Susan check my calculations the day before I came back and she agreed that everything should work."

"So you . . . came back?"

"So I came back," Hermione agreed. "I should be able to get us back about twenty years with a five year margin of error . . . how about it? We can save everyone, I figure the addition of a battle hardened Auror, a spell developer, the Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts, and a psychotic assassin, should be enough to bring about a more favorable outcome. And if not, well then we can always try again and again until we get things right."

"I'm in," Harry said immediately. "I do what I do to make the world a better place, seems that this'll give me a chance to do just that."

"I'm in as well," Luna agreed after a moment of thought. "Especially if it gives me a chance to save mummy."

"Susan?" Hermione asked nervously.

"Are you kidding?" Susan asked incredulously. "A chance to make history with a spell thought impossible? Of course I'm in, besides it's not like any one of us will lose anything if something goes wrong is it?" The group nodded grimly at her question. "So, when do we start?"

AN: An idea that's been bothering me for a while, thought I'd take the time to put pen to paper. It came from 'Odd Ideas' and I'm finally giving it a story of its own. Polish by dogbertcarroll.

## Screw History

Harry awoke with a groan and the first thing he noticed was that the world seemed larger than it did when he went to bed.

"It . . . worked?" he asked with an amused smile. "Wonder how old I am?"

Shrugging the matter off as unimportant, Harry examined his surroundings and found that he was back in his cupboard.

"Be it ever so humble," he muttered as he slid a loose nail out of the door frame and used it to pop the lock.

According to the clock, it was a little before three in the morning so Harry figured that he had about four hours to arrange things and six before his 'loving family' woke up.

Harry ghosted up the stairs and into his Aunt and Uncle's room. A few minutes of rummaging garnered him an old fashioned hat pin from his Aunt's jewelry box and two quick thrusts between the vertebrae paralyzed two of the people that had shaped Harry into what he was.

Harry had gathered everything portable, valuable, and easily missed into a small pile. It wasn't like Petunia and Vernon were going to need it, he reasoned, and no sense letting it go to waste.

"This would have been so much easier if one of them smoked," Harry groused to himself as he rewired an outlet. "Electrical fires take so much time to arrange." Shrugging the matter off, Harry drained the battery on the smoke detector with a small application of magic before turning to complete his task.

'On the other hand,' he thought to himself, Dudley hasn't really done anything yet . . . sighing, he replaced the battery before sparking the fire. 'Why not let fate decide if the fat boy should live?' he reasoned, as he disappeared into the night. After all, he could always return to finish the job if Dudley became the man he had in the old timeline.

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'Electrical Fire Leaves Boy Orphaned,' Hermione felt a wave of excitement as she read the story about the tragic deaths of the Dursleys. Harry had returned and her plan had worked, even if it was just the two of them that had gone back, her plan had worked.

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The Magical World was not a healthy place Harry mused as he entered the abandoned house. Two Dark Uprisings and the London Blitz had done a lot to reduce the population and, as an unintended consequence, leave hundreds of un-claimed properties sitting around for anyone that chose to exploit them.

'The wards on this particular house were good,' Harry thought admiringly, certainly good enough to keep it from being noticed by one of the few professional wizard thieves, but not nearly good enough to stand up to Harry's careful prodding. Thanks to his chosen profession, Harry could give the best cursebreakers a run for their money, a ward like this hardly served to slow him down.

"Let's see what we have here," he said to himself as he made a slow search of the house. "A few books, a few items, but nothing really useful." With a philosophical shrug, Harry pocketed the few things that seemed worth taking before settling down for the night.

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"Mummy?" Luna said in a low voice. "Mummy wake up." Hands trembling a bit, Luna grabbed her mother's wand and took a deep breath. Her entire demeanor changed as she began incanting, pouring every bit of magic she could muster into the woman's body in an attempt to stabilize her long enough to save her life. When she was done, Luna stumbled drunkenly towards the fireplace. "St. Mungo's Emergency," she slurred.

"You have reached St. Mungo's Emergency Room, please state the nature of your medical emergency."

"Help me," Luna gasped before the world went dark.

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Harry woke up late that day and gathered his things; long years of paranoia had taught him the value of never sleeping in the same place for more than one night. After one last look around, Harry automatically reached for his wand to cast the charms that would erase the signs that he'd ever been there.

"Damn," Harry laughed, "forgot all about that . . . guess I'm going to have to make getting a new one a priority." He bit his lip as he began to think. "Suppose I could find a house with a good potions lab," he mused, "Come to think of it, didn't someone used to keep a bottle of Polyjuice in one of their pockets? Now who was that . . . and for that matter, will they have it on them now?"

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Amelia stormed into St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies with a look of determination on her face. After a quick look around, she found her friend's room and set about questioning the Healer she caught coming out of it.

"Well?" Amelia demanded.

"Well, what?" the Healer asked sourly.

"Well Selene Lovegood is a friend of mine and I want to know what happened to her," Amelia growled.

"She says it was an accident," the Healer replied, "testing some sort of new spell and doesn't remember what happened after that. Would have died if someone hadn't stabilized her."

"Who?" Amelia demanded.

"An Auror of some sort would be my guess," the Healer said after a moment of thought, "some of the medical charms used are the sort taught in the Academy."

"Some?"

"Most of them are charms none of my healers have ever heard of," the Healer said with a shake of his head, "charms I didn't think were possible."

"So we've got a cross between an Auror, a Healer, and a spell researcher running around?" Amelia said dryly. "You know what? I'm fine with that. How's Selene's daughter doing?"

"Says she doesn't remember a thing after her mummy wouldn't wake up," the Healer replied, "won't leave her mother's side."

"I guess that's understandable," Amelia sighed, "thank you." She abruptly turned and walked into her friend's room.

"Always happy to help Madame Bones," the Healer said dryly.

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'Picking pockets is such a useful skill,' Harry thought to himself, 'it's like the gift that keeps on giving.'

It hadn't been easy to find someone who habitually carried Polyjuice, especially since Harry couldn't remember who it was. Hey, you kill enough people and their faces start merging.

'Not like dead people are important,' Harry reassured himself, 'it's the live ones that are dangerous.'

On the plus side, in addition to his new Polyjuice, Harry had also acquired a number of other potentially useful items, and enough gold for a moderately large shopping spree.

"Never let it be said that crime doesn't pay," Harry said happily, "now for the unpleasant part of my plan."

He eyed the Polyjuice in disgust. "Bottoms up."

After the transformation, he quickly dressed in some of the clothes that he'd looted from one of the empty houses and made his way to Knockturn Alley and the used wand shop that he hoped existed in this time.

"Can I help you?" the wizard behind the counter asked without looking up from his pornography. It was the July Centaurs on Goblins, hot stuff.

"I need a wand," Harry said coldly.

"Pick one you like and bring it to the counter," the shopkeeper said as he admired the centerfold. He didn't know that Goblins could hold their breath that long, or that Centaurs were so flexible.

Harry took a few minutes to browse the shop until he found one that felt right.

"This is the one," Harry said confidently.

"Mistletoe thirteen inches, filled with the ichor of Talos . . . a very unusual combination."

"True," Harry agreed. "But one that makes it very adept at one thing?"

"What would that be?"

"Killing," Harry said simply. "Reducto."

Harry really hated to be so messy, but 'needs must' and all that. A few flicks of his new wand packed everything in the shop and a few more waves insured that a nice fire would consume everything left behind.

Harry whistled happily as he walked out the back door, with any luck the fire would spread to the neighboring shops and give Knockturn Alley a bit of much needed renovation. If not, well it wouldn't be too much trouble to come back and handle a little urban renewal himself.

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Hermione's parents walked into the Headmaster's office with twin looks of worry on their faces. What could have possibly happened to make the man call them in for a meeting in the middle of the day? Hermione had always been such a well behaved child and they hoped that her recent change in behavior wasn't the cause of this latest difficulty.

"Ms. Granger, Mr. Granger. Thank you both for coming."

"What's this about?" Hermione's mother asked in a slow measured tone.

"It's your daughter," the Headmaster replied, "I'm afraid that her current classes just aren't challenging enough for her." He ignored the looks of relief that had appeared on their faces at that pronouncement. "We'd like your permission to have her tested."

"Of course," Hermione's mother agreed cheerfully, "what grade do you think she'll get into?"

"Well," the admin began slowly, "considering the fact that the teacher caught her reading a book on advanced physics rather than the assigned reading, which was 'Mr. Toad is my MP,' I'd say she'll skip quite a few of them . . . mint?"

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'Grave-robbing is such a distasteful term,' Harry thought to himself as he excavated the Riddle family cemetery. 'What is it that separates this from the noble Gringotts employees that loot the tombs of Egyptian kings? The time perhaps?' Harry wondered, 'or perhaps because Egyptians were a bunch of Wogs that didn't deserve to keep what they couldn't hold?'

"Another ring," Harry said in delight after he'd pried open the coffin belonging to one of Tom's distant ancestors. "Must be my lucky day."

A couple quick flicks of his wand destroyed the bones and Harry put a reasonable copy in their place. After all, it wouldn't do to destroy the 'Bone-of-Father' just to find out later that a 'Bone-of-Distant-Cousin' would do just as well, best to be thorough.

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"Aunt Amelia, Aunt Amelia," Susan squealed when her Aunt got home. "Look, we got a letter."

"You didn't touch it did you?" Amelia asked in concern.

"Nope," Susan agreed, "just like you taught me." 'And let me tell you what a pain it was to find one of your spare wands and remove all the evidence that would disprove that statement,' she thought to herself. "What is it?"

"Seems to be safe," Amelia muttered to herself, "it . . . it looks like a page full of new spells," Amelia said in shock, "including a couple of new healing spells."

"Who sent it?"

"There's no signature," Amelia said with a smile, "but there is a smudge of black ink."

"Oh." She hadn't noticed that. 'Getting complacent in your old age Susan,' she reproached herself.

"Go wash your hands and get ready for dinner while I look over Mr. Black Ink's letter, okay Susan?"

"Okay Aunty Amelia," Susan agreed cheerfully. 'Well,' she thought to herself, 'that was unexpected.'

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Harry had crawled through two hundred feet of what had to be the third nastiest muck he'd had to go through in his life. 'It was worth it,' he assured himself, as he tried not to gag, 'worth it because it will help remove one of the major players that had made the old world as bad as it was.'

A few quick stunners insured that the elves wouldn't interfere and a quick floo call to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement insured that all the guests would arrive on time.

While he waited, Harry amused himself by removing some of the more valuable items in the house . . . it wasn't like anyone would be around to miss them. Waste not, want not and all that rot.

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Lucius Malfoy was awakened by a loud pounding coming from his front door. Throwing on his robe, he walked down the stairs and opened the door to see one of the more annoying people he had the misfortune to regularly interact with.

"What's this all about Amelia?" Lucius asked in a silky voice. His countenance betraying no hint about his true feelings concerning the woman.

"We've received a credible tip that you've got a cache of Dark Artifacts hidden under your drawing room floor," Amelia replied briskly.

"Well I'm afraid that I have to admit that I do have some . . . questionable items," Lucius oozed. "They're all in the nature of family heirlooms, quite legal to own so long as they are properly stored and not misused."

"I'll be the judge of what's legal," Amelia hissed. "Aurors."

Lucius sighed as he watched the Aurors undo months of work, idly wondering what it would cost him to buy another pardon. Perhaps he would pay the extra charge to have the Aurors disbarred for planting evidence against him, he mused. It would be amusing to see the Bones Bitch put in her place. Yes, he decided, he would pay the extra amount.

"Reducto," a voice whispered from behind and Lucius watched in horror as the spell flew past him and destroyed the face of one of his old colleagues.

"Shit," Amelia screamed. "Get him."

Lucius didn't even have a chance to protest his innocence before his body was hit by several dozen restricted spells, the war hadn't been over long and some people had very long memories.

"Check 'im," Amelia ordered. She noted with satisfaction the way her Aurors spread out to cover the entrances.

"He's dead Amelia," one of the Aurors said with a satisfied grin. "I'd like to see the bastard try to buy his way out of the underworld."

"Auror Perkins?"

"Dead too."

"Shame," Amelia sighed. "Find the rest of the family, I want them all in custody while we get to the bottom of all this."

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Harry allowed himself a brief moment of satisfaction as he left the former Malfoy Manor, three Malfoys and one traitor wasn't too bad. Sure he'd had times where he'd done better, considerably better, but that was in the past . . . future . . . whatever.

The point was, that it was an impressive job for someone of his age.

Now all he wanted to do is find a nice hot shower; cleaning charms were all well and good but they never really made you feel as clean as good old soap and water.

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Amelia took a quick glance through the trap door in the drawing room floor and was amazed by the number of illegal dark artifacts she could see in the Malfoy patriarch's hidden hole. No wonder the man had chosen to fight it out, she saw half a dozen items that each carried a mandatory ten year sentence for possession.

"We found the other Malfoys, Amelia," the Auror called out. "It's ugly."

"What happened?" Amelia called back as she walked towards the scene.

"Looks like the mother smothered her son with a pillow before offing herself," he said professionally. "Must have heard the fight downstairs."

"Why'd she do it?" Amelia asked herself. "The most we could have done is . . . guess it doesn't matter, tag them and bag them."

"You want us to continue the search?"

"Leave no stone unturned," Amelia agreed. "No sense wasting a perfectly good warrant."

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Dumbledore frowned as he read the paper. 'Shame about the Dursley family, but so long as the boy's cousin survived then all would be well.'

He smiled as he read that Dudley would be taken in by his Aunt Marge, no doubt the wards had prevented the paper from mentioning Harry. Dumbledore decided to reward himself with a lemon drop. 'Damn, I'm good.'

The Headmaster briefly considered checking on Harry in person, checking to insure that all would be well and if necessary moving the wards to the new house.

"I'm sure it'll all work out without my hand," Dumbledore said to himself, "the wards should move on their own and the Dursley woman will probably be overjoyed to have two children dumped . . . er that is to say placed in her care."

'Yeah,' he thought to himself, 'that must be right.' Deciding to reward himself with another lemon drop, Dumbledore put the entire matter out of his mind.

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The years passed and the body count rose as dozens of former and possible Death Eaters perished in a variety of horrific ways. There was no proof that any of these deaths could be attributed to anything that couldn't be easily explained, but that didn't prevent the more astute members of society from noticing that something odd was happening.

"Over the last few years," Amelia began, "there have been a number of strange events."

"Define strange events please," one of her fellow cabinet members asked politely.

"It started when Selene Lovegood was found injured in her home," Amelia continued, "Someone had stabilized her using a number of unknown charms. Two other things happened that week, a mysterious fire burned down half of Knockturn Alley and I received

the first of many letters containing strange new spells from a man I've been calling Mr. Black Ink . . . or Mister Black for short."

"Is that all?"

"That was all that happened in that week," Amelia replied, "if you expand the time frame you have the tip that led us to Lucius Malfoy . . ."

"Bad business that, loosing an Auror."

"We found the Dark Mark on his arm when we did the postmortem examination," the Chief Healer at St. Mungo's interjected. "It was thought best to keep quiet about that."

"Why would he kill a fellow Death Eater?" the Head of the DOM blurted.

"We're not sure he did," Amelia reluctantly admitted, "an examination of his wand did not show any combat spells cast in the last several cycles. There's also what happened to the Malfoy family. Taken alone it's strange, and when you consider the fact that several other suspected Death Eaters have died under mysterious circumstances, it paints quite a different picture."

"Have any proof?" the Head of the DOM asked calmly.

"None at all," Amelia replied, "just a lot of strange events that add up to something even stranger when taken altogether."

"We'll keep our eyes out then," the Chief Healer offered, "for any other signs of this . . . Mister Black."

"That's all I'm asking," Amelia said with a nod, "thank you."

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Harry was sitting in a cheap hotel room in Romania, watching through the window as a group of wizards below concluded a deal.

If asked, he'd have to admit that he was more then a bit disappointed by what he was seeing. The men below weren't Dark Wizards, not if you took the conventional use of the term anyway.

They were criminals and thugs yes, terrorists no. Harry briefly considered calling the authorities in and washing his hands of the entire business, it was none of his business what they were doing, nothing he cared about.

"Although," he mused, "that is quite a lot of money down there . . . what the hell, not a one of them was on the side of the angels. Not like I give a damn what happens to them." In a flash, Harry's spare wand appeared in his hand. "Now who wants to go first?"

"Hoot."

"How'd you get in here?" Harry muttered. He took the letter from the owl and glanced over it. "Hmmm, to Harry Potter. Grungy Romanian Flophouse. My Hogwarts letter, huh?"

"Hoot," the owl confirmed or possibly called him something insulting in bird language, Harry was never quite sure when it came to any owl but his own and after hearing the way most snakes spoke about other species he wasn't sure he wanted to know.

Harry wrote out a quick acceptance letter and handed it to the owl.

"Now where was I?" he said to himself as he walked back to the window. "Right, I think I'll take Mr. Beardy Beard first . . . say cheese."

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"Luna, what are you doing?" Selene demanded. She'd woken up early that morning and was shocked to find her daughter doing spells in the kitchen.

"Uh . . ." Luna plastered a smile on her face. "I'm trying to help with the housework mummy." She winced, that excuse even sounded weak to her.

"Really?" Selene asked with a proud smile. "How did you learn?"

"I learned by watching you," Luna said quickly. She couldn't believe this was working. "See?" A couple quick flicks of her wand cleaned the dirty dishes are in the sink.

"Very good Luna," Selene said proudly, "now why don't you go play with daddy? I need to make a floo call."

"Ok mummy," Luna agreed.

"Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry," Selene said as she threw a handful of floo powder into the fire. "Minerva, it's so wonderful."

"What is?"

"I caught Luna using my wand earlier today," Selene replied. "Looks like I've got a prodigy on my hands. I'd like to enroll Luna a year earlier than expected."

"Are you sure?"

"She's only a few months too young as it is," Selene waved off the older woman's concerns, "and I'm afraid that I don't have the skills to teach her for a year myself."

"If you're sure," Minerva agreed, "I'll speak to Albus and set things up."

"Thank you, Minerva."

"Happy to help, Selene."

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Amelia was going through her mail when she came across two letters addressed to her niece.

"Susan," Amelia called out, "come out here."

"What is it Aunt Amelia?"

"We've got a new letter from Mr. Black," Amelia said with a smile, "and, more importantly, your Hogwarts letter came."

"Really?"

"Really," Amelia said, "oh if only your parents were here to see this. Your mother would have been crying and your father would be so proud he'd burst . . . or the other way around. The important thing is that we need to do something special to celebrate this; would you like to go out to eat later?"

"Okay Aunt Amelia."

"And we can spend the day shopping for your school things," Amelia continued, "I'll call the office to let them know that I'm taking the day off."

After her Aunt had gone, Susan lifted up her skirt and stared at her legs for a few seconds. She was determined to keep her Aunt alive this time; keeping her ability to tap dance would be a nice bonus too.

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Minerva was more then a bit confused when she walked into the Physics building, but this was where the girl's neighbors had said she would be at this time of day.

"Excuse me," Minerva said as she walked into the office. "But there isn't a child named Hermione Granger here, is there?" She knew it had to be a mistake, what kind of child took advanced classes at one of the most prestigious universities in the country?"

"Doctor Granger?"

"This has to be a mistake," Minerva said slowly, "the girl I'm looking for is a child."

"That sounds like her," the woman agreed. "I shouldn't have said Doctor though . . . not yet anyway." the receptionist said quickly. "Both of her parents are Doctors of Dentistry, she's got her masters in Physics but she hasn't finished up the PHD yet."

"She has a masters?" Minerva asked in shock. "I've got a letter here for her."

"I'll let them know that you're waiting out here," the receptionist offered, "please take a seat."

"I will, thank you."

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"This is odd," Dumbledore muttered to himself, "I would have thought that Harry's family would have been more difficult."

He took a few minutes to mull over the information. "Perhaps Marge is more tolerant of magic than her brother and sister and law were? Yes . . . yes that must be it," Dumbledore said confidently.

"I deserve another lemon drop for that brilliant piece of deduction," Dumbledore said happily, "and I must remember to send another letter to Harry explaining where and how to get his school supplies."

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Harry walked into Gringotts with a cocky grin on his face and a very special coin in his pocket. It hadn't been easy to set things up, but he had high hopes and low expectations.

"Key?" the goblin growled.

"Don't have one," Harry said cheerfully.

"Then I can't let you in," the goblin said with a happy smile, "nex . . ."

"Not quite correct," Harry interrupted, "according to my contract I do need a key to make withdrawals."

"Then . . ."

"But not to close my accounts," Harry continued, "those will be the Potter vault, my trust vault, my parent's personal vaults, the Black vault, my godfather's personal vault, the Lestrange vault, the Lestrange personal vaults, the Malfoy vaults, the Malfoy personal vaults, and the Gaunt and all connected vaults which are mine by right of conquest." Harry grinned. "And I'll pay the ten Galleon fee for a records check to see if there are any other vaults that I can claim, if any are found then I'd like them closed as well."

"What?" the goblin asked sickly.

"I'm the heir to the heir of the Black family," Harry explained, "he's in prison and as such legally dead. Everything he once had was passed to me, same situation with the Lestrange family. They're all in lock up so everything they had goes to the Black family, everything in the Black family goes to me. The Malfoys are dead, their monies and possessions go to the Black family and as you know . . ."

"Yes . . . would you like to supervise the transfer?" the goblin asked sourly.

"I believe I would," Harry agreed, "just think . . . I wouldn't have closed my accounts if you'd have had some way of letting me make withdrawals without a key . . . shame that." That was a lie, but they didn't know that.

"We do," the teller said quickly, "all we have . . ."

"I'm afraid that I've already made my decision," Harry said calmly.

"Griphook," the teller screamed, "take this human to supervise the procedure."

"Just transfer it all to my Swiss account." Harry twisted the knife. "The gnomes give such better interest."

"See that it's done," the teller snapped.

"Yes sir," Griphook agreed. "This way, human."

Harry watched with a satisfied smile as all the gold under his control was removed from Gringotts. The goblins in general, and one goblin in particular, had taken advantage of their ability to limit access to gold during the war.

'Armies may march on their stomachs,' Harry thought to himself, 'but wars are won and lost by gold. More gold means more medicine, more food, more weapons. Less means death. After all, winning a war may take almost everything you have, but losing takes it all.'

"Is it rude to offer a tip?" Harry asked, after the gnomes had confirmed possession of the Potter fortune.

"Not at all," Griphook said quickly.

"Here you are then," Harry passed the goblin his special coin, specially covered in contact poison.

The thought that Griphook would spend the next week dying in horrible agony warmed Harry's heart. Griphook's conduct had been especially bad during the war, even compared with that of the other goblins. The thought that some other goblin might handle the coin before the poison lost its effectiveness bothered him not at all.

"That's it?" Griphook looked at the Knut in his hand in disgust.

"If you'd rather I keep it . . ."

"No," Griphook said quickly.

"Alright then," Harry said. He left the bank whistling cheerfully to himself.

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Minerva led Hermione through the Leaky Cauldron and into the magical world's largest shopping district.

"Doctor Granger," Minerva felt a bit odd addressing a small child that way.

"ABD Professor," Hermione said cheerfully, "could you just call me Hermione?"

"Of course, Hermione," Minerva agreed, "and you may call me Minerva when we're outside of class."

"Thank you for taking the time to escort me to Diagon Alley," Hermione said politely, "do you mind if we pick up a few extra things while we're there?"

"What sort of extra things?"

"Books mostly."

"Of course," Minerva agreed, "in fact . . . I believe I know of several Transfiguration books that might interest you. Have you ever thought of taking a Mastery in Transfiguration?"

"I'm not even sure what that is," Hermione said as convincingly as she could.

"Well from what I understand of Physics." Very little. "It will compliment your studies in Transfiguration quite well. And of course I'll always be on hand to help you with your work."

"Thank you, Professor."

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Amelia looked over the parcel that had arrived for her niece with a bemused look on her face.

"Susan," Amelia called out, "come in here please."

"What is it Aunt Amelia?" Susan asked.

"Looks like you've got a package," Amelia replied, "I wanted your permission to check it for traps. I'm also going to have to open it to make sure that it's safe."

"Okay Aunt Amelia," Susan agreed.

"Hmmm." Amelia looked up with a smile. "Looks like Mr. Black Ink sent you a gift to celebrate your entry to Hogwarts."

"Really?" Susan asked in shock. She inspected the contents of the package. "It's an old Roman manuscript on spell creation."

"Guess he thinks you have the potential to follow in his footsteps," Amelia said with a pleased smile.

"Looks like it," Susan agreed. 'Thanks, Harry.'

Around the country, two other girls were also opening packages from their secret admirer.

"What is it Hermione?" her mother asked.

"It's a book on Romanian history mum," Hermione replied.

"That's nice, dear."

Luna's parents were a bit more enthusiastic about the book their daughter had been sent . . .

"Look at this darling," Selene said happily, "it's a compilation of magical animals written up by scholars in the Library of Alexandria."

"I knew it," Luna's father cheered, "I knew Mug Footed Warbies weren't just a product of my imagination."

"What do those healers know," Selene agreed disdainfully, "they're of the opinion that we're all crazy, so that just goes to prove that they don't know anything."

"Right you are, my love."

Luna watched happily as her parents embraced.

While a normal child of her physical age would be disgusted by witnessing such an enthusiastic show of affection, Luna was anything but normal and she was no more a child now than she had been six years from now, three years ago.

She loved to see her parents together. Every time they kissed helped heal the void in her heart, that had formed after the death of her mother in the old time line. Every time they hugged helped her forget her father's long downward spiral as he lost himself in grief.

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Hermione was the first student to board the train and she immediately staked out her favorite car. She couldn't wait for her friends to arrive and longed more than anything to have a conversation with the three other people on earth that remembered the old world.

"Harry," Hermione said cheerfully when she walked into the compartment, "I was wondering if I'd see you."

"Wouldn't miss it," Harry replied, "there are a few loose ends I'd like to tie up here."

"Snape?"

"If the mountain won't go and all that," Harry agreed. They were joined a few minutes later by Luna and Susan.

"What are you doing here, Luna?"

"Mum caught me casting spells a few months ago," Luna sighed, "and so I've been sent here a year early. It's no big deal, I was almost old enough to come this year anyway."

"S'what happens when you get complacent," Susan admonished, "so what's everyone been doing?"

"Nothing much," Harry replied. "Seeing the world, meeting strange and interesting people . . ."

"Then killing them," Hermione suggested, "yes, we all know . . . and would it have killed you to visit?"

"It might have," Harry replied, having kept an extremely low profile despite his rather high profile hobbies during his time back.

"Why don't we all yell at Harry for being inconsiderate and not visiting any of us later," Luna suggested, "what have you been doing, Hermione?"

"Nothing much," Hermione replied, "just going to school."

"You know, Aunty mentioned that one of the muggleborn students had an advanced degree from Oxford," Susan mused.

"So I was bored," Hermione replied quickly, "I lasted about a week before I broke. Besides, don't think I didn't get a look at the Daily Prophet, Luna."

"I'm not doing anything too noticeable, Just spending as much time as I can with mum," Luna said serenely, "they have no idea who sends in that column. Not like Susan and her spells."

"They have no idea who invents those spells either," Susan growled, "what do you mean not like Susan?"

"Hmmm?" Luna blinked. "Sorry, that was supposed to be just like Susan and her spells. Everyone should have a hobby after all."

"What spells?" Hermione asked.

"I wrote most of our first year charms books," Susan said with a shrug, "Aunty is convinced that there's an insane spell inventor wandering the earth doing good . . . oh, and killing lots and lots of people."

"What?"

"She's nicknamed him Mr. Black," Susan said with a giggle, "coincidentally, it's the same nickname she has for another 'friend' of hers. You pick up the most mentally scarring information when you're testing new listening charms," she ended with a sigh.

"Other friend?"

"It lives in a her sock drawer," Susan explained.

"Oh."

"I don't get it," Harry said with a frown, "what kind of friend lives in a sock drawer?"

"The kind for lonely women," Hermione explained absently, "so how's everyone been doing other then that?"

"Felt a bit odd to pretend to be a child," Harry replied, "so I skipped it and treated myself to a world tour."

AN: I couldn't resist . . . just couldn't, how could you expect me to? Mister Black returns . . . well . . . sort of. Polish by Shanoah, Tommy King, bobman10000, Gordon Pettey, maoppermann, and dogbertcarroll.

Omake: Thrice Defied.

Snape glowered at the Frank Longbottom and his girlfriend Alice. How dare they defy him like this? He'd told them three times that stripes and plaid just weren't the right color combination to wear to the spring formal but the fashion challenged fools had ignored them.

"That's it," he said to himself. "Severus Snape the fashion consultant is no more . . . why don't we try Severus Snape the Potions master and Death Eater?"

Omake by dogbertcarroll

Harry patted Neville on the back as he stared despairingly at his potions quiz.

"I got a Troll minus. No one has ever got a Troll minus on potions before. He even took points off for the way I spell my name."

"It's not that bad. I got ahold of his old potions book and look at this." Harry held out an old and heavily folded test being used as a bookmark.

Neville unfolded it and began to snicker. "He got a Troll minus on his first one too! He marked me the same as his first one. I guess you're right, I'm not that hopeless. If Snape can go from Troll minus to

teaching then I can at least get an EE."

'And he shall mark him as his equal'

Omake by meteoricshipyards: Another conversation at the Reunion

Harry and Susan watched Luna as she went to get more drinks.

"Amazing that "Loony" Lovegood turned out to be one of the best Aurors since Mad Eye," the blond spell wight commented.

"That's just because people didn't pay attention to her. She was always so quiet in the DA that no one noticed she needed hardly any help when learning new spells, or that her aim was so good. When we

went to the Department of Mysteries, she rescued a half crazed Ron and a Ginny who was in too much pain from her broken ankle to

cast a spell, and once she became responsible for them, she didn't let another spell hit them until we were all overwhelmed.

"And when she encountered that group of Junior Death Eaters. . . ."

"They were over seventeen and all marked," Susan commented.

"Yes, but there were five of them against Luna and myself. They thought I'd do anything to protect her. . . ."

"You wouldn't?"

"I would, but only if she needed it. You should have seen Parkinson's face when they found out how bloody \_competent\_ "Loony" Lovegood was with a wand." Harry laughed, until he remembered what they found in the next room after defeating their former schoolmates.

Susan put an arm around him, as she saw his expression change. She knew what he was remembering, and gave him a squeeze.

"We all miss them," she whispered. Harry nodded, as Luna and Hermione also enveloped him with their arms.

Another Omake by meteoricshipyards

-Where are we?

-I don't know.

-Did it work?

-I think so.

-Everyone here?

-I am.

-Who are you? I mean we're not talking. I don't even think we're breathing.

-This is Hermione.

-I'm Luna.

-Susan here!

-That means I'm Harry. So the spell did something, we're together, but we can't tell where we are. Or when. Or if.

-But we are together.

-I feel that this place is familiar.

-Who said that?

-Hermione. I just feel warm and protected.

-I hear something.

-Me too.

-I don't recognize the noise.

-I hear a heartbeat. It's really pounding.

-Now that you mention it, so do I. And . . . grunting?

-"Bubala?" Who uses that word?

-My mother.

-Who's that?

-Hermione again. My mother calls my father that when they're alone. At night. All alone. In the bedroom.

-How do you know?

-I was a very curious child. I would listen at their door when I heard sounds in the night.

-I hear something else. Singing. Very tiny singing.

-Who said that?

-Luna. I think I can direct us. I see something. Well, see isn't quite the word, but it's close. There do you see it?

-It's tiny. And you're right. It is singing.

-Tiny? It's microscopic. It's spherical and microscopic and singing? Why doesn't that seem to make any sense.

-It's singing, "Come to me"? This isn't making any sense.

-Wait I hear something else. It's like a crowd of voices?

-Yes that way.

-What way. There's no up and down here.

-That had to be Hermione.

-You want to make something of it, Potter?

-Er, I'm Susan.

-Sorry. But I hear the crowd, too.

-They're singing, too.

-What are they saying?

-Listen! "I'm coming. Got to get there first." over and over.

-There they are! Hundreds of them. Snakes!

-Oh, good lord! They're not snakes.

-What are they?

-They're sperm. And that's an egg. And I'm the oldest, so that's probably mine.

-Then that means. . . .

-I always was a bit of a voyeur, but I've never watched this.

-You pervert, Harry.

-That wasn't me.

-That was me, Luna. I wonder if we can go up. . . .

-Don't you dare! That's my parents!

-All those times listening, didn't you ever watch?

-No, they always locked the door.

-Oh, look, one's made it. They're singing a duet now.

-And the rest of the sperm is going away sad. I wish. . . .

-Don't you say it, Luna.

-Awwww.

-So, the spell must have taken us further back than planned, right Hermione? Hermione?

-I don't think she's with us any more. I think that we're looking at her.

-So what happens now?

-I think we wait a few months and visit my parents, and then yours Harry. Luna, you're going to be like this for about a year.

-It will only be a few months after Harry. He's born in July and I'm in October.

-Do we know if this will work when we go all the way back to the beginning?

=Yes.

-Someone else? Who said that?

=Me. Hermione. Im in the cell. Can't talk much now. I'm getting ready to split.

-You're leaving?

=No! Not split/leave. Split/divide. Talk to you later.

-I guess it worked.

Omake By: meteoricshipyards

"Harry? Did you kill those death eaters?"

"No, Hermione! I'd never!"

"Harry?"

"Well, a may have. A little."

"A little Harry?"

"Maybe a little, yeah. And it was an accident. My wand went off when

I wasn't paying attention."

"Sixteen times?"

"Yes. It was an accident."

"What am I going to do with you, you goof!"

Luna piped up, "Oh Harry! You know being dark and daring makes me hot!"

Hermione turned on the blonde, "Not now, Luna . . ."

"Awwwww."

Hermione continued, ". . . We're only six. At least wait until puberty!"

"OK, it's a date!"

OMAKE by ubereng

"Damn!" Harry said. "As I was doing that last job..."

"You mean the Goyle's?" Interrupted Hermione.

"Yeah," Harry replied. "Anyway, I felt all giddy and happy. Like I even wanted to hug and kiss Mrs Goyle! Yech, I mean am I finally losing it, Hermione?"

Hermione turned her head and coughed. The cough might have sounded a little like "finally?".

Luna piped up, "It's your nargles, Harry. That's what they do."

"Nargles, what nargles?"

"Your wand's crawling with them. Let me see it."

Harry pulled his mistletoe wand out of his back pocket. Luna took it and took a small jar out of her purse. "This is a pepper shaker." She sprinkled pepper along Harry's wand. Several tiny "achooos" could be heard along the length of it.

"This is insecticide," Luna said as she pulled a spray can out of her purse. Soon several tiny "aarghs" could be heard falling from Harry's wand to the carpet.

"Oh, Harry," Hermione chided. "Didn't anyone tell you not to carry your wand in your back pocket?"

Harry's tone was acid, "I'm not going to blast a buttock off!"

"Maybe not. But, certain infections can spread from there," Hermione replied as Luna pulled Harry's waistband out and sprinkled in some pepper. Several tiny "achooos" could be heard from Harry's boxers.

## The Slytherin Curse

While the group of time travelers rode the train to Hogwarts, Dumbledore was having a very difficult conversation in his office.

"Thank you for meeting with me Amelia," Dumbledore said as he waved the woman towards a chair, "lemon drop?"

"Why thank you Albus." She pocketed the candy with a mental note to pass it along to forensics. "Now then, what can I do for you?"

"I'm sure you've noticed the large number of accidents befalling several of our alumni?"

"You're speaking of the so called 'Curse of Slytherin' right?"

"Yes," Dumbledore agreed, "I have reason to believe that either one person or a small group is responsible."

"Do tell?"

"And I would like you to investigate this," the Headmaster continued, "hopefully we can put an end to this before there are more senseless deaths."

"I'm afraid that I'm going to have to turn down your request Albus," Amelia said sweetly, "I just don't have the resources to waste on what could be a wild goose chase . . . unless of course you have proof?"

"No . . . no proof," Albus admitted reluctantly, "but surely you realize that there are too many incidents to be attributed to coincidence?"

"Surely I don't care enough about the fates of Death Eaters to act without proof," Amelia said happily. She would treasure the look of shock on the old bastard's face for the rest of her life. "You've always been a big believer in second chances, Albus. That is why you arranged for a multiple murderer to turn 'states' evidence after all . . . how is Severus doing anyway?"

"Still teaching," Dumbledore said sourly.

"Then why don't you, oh I don't know, offer this mythical man a job?"

"What?"

"Just think of this as a chance to give whoever is behind the Slytherin Curse . . . assuming they exist, a second chance. Or a third . . . or fourth . . . if that doesn't work for you, then think of it as a chance to round out your teaching staff with another multiple murderer, be a good change to have a competent Professor in Defense. Oh, and one more thing Albus..."

"What is it Amelia?" Dumbledore asked with an annoyed sigh.

"If Susan comes to harm due to your actions or due to those of your pet Death Eater then I will kill you," she said in a cold voice. "Him too," she added absently. "There won't be a place on Earth that either of you can hide from me."

"I hardly think that's necessary, Amelia. I . . ."

"Don't patronize me," she snapped. "I'm well aware of the fact that you're hiding something in this school. If my niece comes to harm because of it, or due to any one of your little decisions then... You! Will! Die! Am I making myself clear Albus?" she asked sweetly.

"Crystal," he replied, stunned at her lack of faith in him.

"Then have a good day Albus," she said as she showed herself out, "I enjoyed our little conversation so much that I believe we'll have to do it again some time."

"I'm afraid that with the coming session, I doubt that I'll have the time . . ."

"That wasn't a request Albus," she interrupted, "unless you want me to up the security around Susan. I think five Aurors within two meters of her at all times would be sufficient."

"As I was saying," Dumbledore said tightly, "I doubt I'll have the time to have too many meetings, but I'll try to keep my schedule open."

"Thank you Albus," Amelia said as she walked out the door, "I really appreciate that."

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The first thing the group noticed when they walked into the Great Hall was the sheer number of students, almost twice the number that they remembered from the first go around.

"What in the world?" Hermione muttered.

"Didn't you know?" Susan whispered. "In the old world only one in three muggleborn students lived long enough to receive their letter. It seems that they were especially prone to fatal accidents."

"Then Lucius Malfoy and a few of his friends suffer fatal accidents of their own," Luna chimed in, "and the number of accidents befalling muggleborn falls to almost zero. What an amazing coincidence!"

"Isn't it though," Hermione agreed. "I also notice that there aren't very many students in Slytherin," Hermione mused, "and that most of those are in the upper years."

"Slytherin Alumni tend to die in horrific ways," Susan said, "families tell their children to beg the hat to keep them out of it. It's funny but most of the Slytherins in the here and now are muggleborn."

"That's priceless," Hermione giggled. "I know what house I'm going to be in."

"Me too," Harry agreed, "less of a commute." Harry's eyes turned to the sneering head of his future house.

"And much more space," Luna chirped, "I'll bet we could each have private rooms if we wanted."

"Good point," Susan agreed. No way she was going to be stuck alone with a bunch of brats in another house. "It's agreed then?"

"Agreed," the others chorused.

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At that staff table, the Astronomy Professor was in a deep conversation with the Head of Gryffindor House.

"Isn't he a little charmer," Aurora Sinistra said, elbowing her neighbor.

"Isn't whom?" Minerva asked.

"The one with Lily's cheekbones," Aurora whispered, "surrounded by girls."

"Not sure where he got that from," Minerva mused, "James thought girls were icky until some time in his fourth year."

"Forgot about that," Aurora giggled, "you know me and Alice once cornered him in an empty classroom and took turns kissing him. James went to Poppy and demanded she re-grow his lips."

"When was that?"

"Middle of our first year."

"Ah yes," Minerva sighed, "after Poppy wouldn't help, James had Mr. Lupin brew up a potion to cure the problem . . . I believe the house elves finally managed to get the smell out last year."

"Shame Lils isn't around to see this," Aurora sighed, "she had Harry's whole life planned out for him within a week of his birth. Right down to where he'd have his wedding."

"Lily and her lists," Minerva said wistfully, "what did she finally decide on?"

"Coast of Dover," Aurora said after a moment of thought, "with two or three other choices if Harry or his future wife didn't like Dover."

"Shame the accidents didn't start until a couple years ago," Minerva observed tightly, "shame I didn't arrange a few myself. If I'd have known that Sirius . . . I'm sorry Aurora."

"No," Aurora said with an angry frown, "I agree with you. If I knew then what he'd do, I'd have killed him myself."

"Excuse me," Minerva said. She stood up and began reading off names, pausing just a bit before calling out Harry's name. "Potter, Harry."

Harry walked up to the Hat and calmly plopped it on his head.

"Slytherin," the Hat said loudly. The room was silent as Harry placed the Hat back on the stool and calmly strolled over to rejoin his friends.

Minerva quickly overcame her surprise and finished the sorting before taking her seat beside the Astronomy Professor. "I didn't expect that," Minerva said in shock. "James would have been beside himself."

"Until he realized that Harry got the Hat to sort him into Slytherin to stay with his little girlfriends," Aurora said between bouts of giggles, "then he would have been so proud he'd have burst. Talking about the Potter charm and how Harry was a chip off the ol'block."

"Well . . . I guess that's true," Minerva agreed as she watched the four students speak with each other. "He had to give up his dream of having a harem in his fifth year after all so I suppose he'd be happy to live his dream through his son."

"Sixth year," Aurora corrected, "after Lily threatened to cut off his 'best friend' if he didn't. Do you really think little Harry's building himself a harem?"

"Of course not," Minerva said quickly, "but that wouldn't have prevented James from bragging about it."

"True, James never did let inconvenient facts ruin a good story."

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McGonagall and Sinistra's interest in Harry and his companions did not go unnoticed, or unremarked upon.

"Why do they keep looking at us?" Harry said nervously. Years of hunting the most dangerous prey in the world had left Harry acutely aware of when he was being watched.

"Who knows," Hermione said with an easy shrug, "don't be so paranoid, Harry."

"It's not like they can listen in," Susan agreed, "I cast a spell on the train to keep people from being able to monitor our conversations. Even if they can lip read all they'll get is a conversation about ponies."

"Ponies?"

"I like Ponies," Luna offered.

"Couldn't you have a manlier conversation?" Harry asked.

"Little girls talk about ponies," Susan said confidently, "not manly things."

"They do?" Hermione asked in surprise.

"I'm fairly sure they do," Susan agreed uncertainly. "Don't they?" Three bewildered looks met her question. "I guess we'll have to research that then," Susan said, "to make it more realistic."

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Amelia was sitting in her office when one of her underlings brought a bit of welcome news.

"Madame Bones, another pureblood has died of the curse."

"Who?"

"The Lestrange family," the Auror replied, "well . . . every member we know about anyway."

"What happened?" Amelia asked mildly.

"Augusta Longbottom and Moody discovered them in their cell," the Auror said with a straight face, "they were going to visit Sirius Black to ask him why he betrayed the Potter family and the guard accidentally took them to the wrong cell."

"Do tell?" Amelia purred. "And we're sure that Augusta Longbottom and Moody didn't decide to . . . I don't know, get a bit of unofficial justice?"

"No evidence to support that theory," the Auror replied with a grin, "Moody even testified under Veritaserum that they didn't do it and that he did not witness Augusta Longbottom cast any spells."

"Guess that there's no reason to investigate," Amelia mused, "people die in Azkaban all the time. Dispose of the bodies and seal the file."

"Yes Madame Bones," the Auror agreed, "any way I should dispose of them?"

"Fire is always good," Amelia replied, "prevents the spread of disease."

"Understood Madame Bones," the Auror agreed, knowing of a charm that she had taught him that could be used on the spot to incinerate the corpses and kill any traces of magical sickness or disease, although it did have the unfortunate side effect of completely wiping out any trace of magic used in the area.

Amelia sighed heavily after the man had left. Things were so much easier in the old days, before she'd found out how the world was really run.

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After the feast, Harry and the girls followed one of the Slytherin Prefects to their new digs.

"These are your new quarters." The Prefect said sourly, he was one of the few purebloods in Slytherin House, a fact to which he owed his badge. "Boys on the right and girls on the left."

"Where are the . . ." Hermione began.

"Ask someone who gives a damn," the Prefect snapped. "Professor Snape is our Head of House and he's always happy to accept my recommendations on detentions."

"Fine," Hermione agreed. She waited until the boy had left before turning back to her friends. "Harry, I don't usually ask favors but . . ."

"He's going to hang himself," Harry interrupted, "stress of his position was too much for him."

"Thank you Harry," she said sweetly, her face fell as she continued,

"I remember him from before . . . He was one of the ones who . . .

Ron," she finished tightly.

"Oh." Harry smiled. "I guess he's going to botch the job then. You know if you make the rope just a hair too long, then he'll be on his toes and it'll take most of the night before he finally goes. Any others that had a hand in what happened to Ron?"

"I think you got most of them," Hermione sniffed as she wiped a couple tears off her face, "I'll make a list for you later."

"Thank you," Harry said wrapping an arm around his best friend, "could you also . . . all of you, take a look at everyone else at Hogwarts? I'd like to compare lists to make sure no one gets left out that deserves a place with the others."

The three girls nodded in agreement.

"Speaking of not leaving anyone out, what were you planning to do about Sirius?" Susan asked. "I can't imagine that you'd forget about poor Peter."

"I'll think of something," Harry replied. "Peter has been spending most of his time behind the Weasley family wards or in Hogwarts so I haven't spent too much time thinking about the problem."

"I didn't think the Weasley family had anything special around their house," Luna commented.

"They don't," Harry admitted, "but it's all tied to a ward that prevents entry to anyone that means harm to someone being protected by the wards. Fifteen minutes to bring down but then I'd have a whole new set of problems to deal with. Not sure if I could find Peter and set everything up before things went to pot."

"There's also the fact that Aunty Amelia would take notice if you ended up having to harm a member of the Weasley family or one of the responding Aurors."

"True," Harry agreed, "I'd also like him intact enough to confess. Not a major requirement but it'd be nice."

"And you can always kill him later," Luna said impishly.

"And I will just kill him later," Harry corrected, "great things come to those who wait."

"Well . . . I have things to arrange," Harry said with a fake yawn, "good night all."

"Good night Harry," Hermione said.

"Night," Susan echoed.

"Would you like a hand?" Luna asked serenely. "The seventh year boy's Prefect is someone I have an interest in seeing to."

"I don't remember him doing much?"

"Not until after you left the country," Luna explained, "I arrested him two years before we left."

"What'd he do?"

"He had a thing for muggle children," Luna continued, "committed suicide in his cell by bashing his head in with a rock. Such a shame too. As I understand it, his family had raised enough funds to convince a judge that it was a case of mistaken identity."

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Dumbledore walked into the Great Hall the next day with a grave look on his face.

"May I have your attention please," he said loudly. "Thank you, due to unforeseen circumstances, Potions Classes will be canceled for today."

He waited until the cheers had died down before continuing, "Instead, Professor Snape says that there will be a quiz on everything in the first five chapters of your books tomorrow. Thank you."

Ignoring the groaning students, Dumbledore left the Great Hall and walked to the Hospital wing.

"Good of you to join us Albus," Poppy said dryly.

"Did I miss anything?"

"We decided to wait until you got here to perform the Autopsies," Pomfrey replied.

She led the group to a pair of tables and lifted up the sheets. Pulling out her wand she cast several diagnostic charms on the first corpse. "Male fifteen years of age, no sign of glamor or Polyjuice. Died of slow strangulation, appears to be self inflicted."

"Can you tell us anything else Poppy?" Dumbledore asked quietly.

"I could tell you several things if I chose to," Pomfrey agreed. "What sort of details did you want?"

"Was he under the effects of any spells or potions?"

"No sign that he was," Poppy replied, "I assume that Severus could do a more detailed examination of his blood if he so chooses, but I have all the information I need to rule it as accidental."

"Thank you, Poppy. Severus?"

"I'll do them both at once Headmaster," Snape agreed.

"Moving along," Poppy said as she directed her attention to the other body. "Subject is a male of about seventeen years, no sign of glamor or Polyjuice. Death is from injury to the spinal cord, appears to be the result of a fall. No signs of foul play."

"An accident and a suicide then?" Minerva asked.

"Seems to be," Poppy agreed as she put the sheets back over the bodies, "but that's for the Aurors to decide. Bad luck having both happen on the first day of school."

"Bad luck and a Slytherin Curse," Aurora muttered under her breath.

"I found no signs that any magic was used on either of them prior to their deaths," Poppy said sharply.

"I'm sorry Poppy, that isn't what I meant."

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Three sets of eyes followed the Headmaster out of the Great Hall.

"Is everything going to be alright?" Hermione asked after Dumbledore had left the Great Hall.

"Perfectly fine," Harry agreed, "didn't use a bit of magic."

"And Magical Law Enforcement is useless when it comes to non magical techniques," Luna chimed in, "take it from an Auror. Well, an Auror that stayed in after things got quieter anyway."

"Even then, we took the time to erase the signs that a good investigator would notice."

"Impossible to hide everything from the best," Luna said professionally, "something the DMLE doesn't have and I doubt that they'll be willing to call in the Yard on this."

"How long before you go after Snape and Dumbledore?" Susan asked.

"I'll give it a couple weeks for Snape," Harry said calmly, "Dumbledore isn't on my list . . . be happy to help one of you if he's on yours though."

"He's not? I'd have thought that after everything he did . . ." she trailed off.

"No doubting that the old man's an idiot," Harry agreed, "just not a malicious one. I kill evil people, not incompetents. If I started offing

people on the basis of incompetence I'd never finish. Heh, you should have heard how he planned to defeat Voldemort."

"That bad huh?"

"Voldemort takes over, kills most of the muggleborn, and hits me with a killing curse."

"That's a victory plan?" Luna asked in shock.

"Admittedly, there were a few details I left out."

"Like what?"

"Hermione, R . . . Ron, and I tracking down a few soul fragments and living in a tent."

"That's his great plan?"

"I think old age might have been catching up with him," Harry explained, "that or he got dropped on his head a lot as a child."

"Any suggestions on how to deal with class?" Hermione spoke up. "Do we all act like children or do we go to the top of our year?"

"What do you think we should do DOCTOR Granger?" Susan asked sweetly. "Luna's a prodigy, you've got a PHD . . ."

"ABD," Hermione interrupted.

"Whatever," Susan waved it off as unimportant, "my Aunt is convinced that some brilliant but insane spell researcher has made me his heir and Harry is the 'bloody-boy-who-just-won't-bloody-die.' So tell me Hermione, what do you think would stand out more? Fitting in or running to the front of the pack?"

"When you put it that way," Hermione said with a blush.

"Besides," Harry said with a grin. "What's the fun in being normal? We didn't come back here to play things out the same as they did in the past, we came to shake things up a bit."

"Agreed," Luna said with a nod.

"Motion carries then?" Hermione asked. "Good, I don't think I could have survived being a normal student again."

"When were you ever normal?"

"Hush you."

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After the Autopsy, Dumbledore reported the deaths to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement and was only mildly surprised when Amelia Bones herself arrived to take charge of the investigation.

"What about now Amelia?" Dumbledore asked the woman as she watched her Aurors go through the dead student's possessions.

"Now I'm noting that I just saw a class four restricted artifact taken out of that trunk," Amelia said conversationally. "And wondering if you have any evidence to present to me?"

"You know, I can make your life very difficult if I chose to."

"And I can do the same to you," Amelia agreed, "it would quickly get very nasty and I suspect that both of us would end up retiring. As I've said before, if you want to investigate then do so with your own resources."

"If I pay for the overtime, will you loan me a couple of Aurors?"

"If they want to work for you, they can do it in their own time. May we go off the record?"

"Certainly."

"Your word on it?"

"On my magic," Albus agreed as he made the oath.

"I find it hard to care about the deaths of a bunch of people that bribed their way out of Azkaban," Amelia said coldly, "I know you

believe in second chances but there are some things in this world that can't be forgiven."

"Severus has shown . . ."

"That he has a Dark Mark," Amelia interrupted, "do you know what you need to do to get 'rewarded' with a Dark Mark? We had two undercover Aurors that got to that stage, they were both withdrawn before it came to that at their own requests and they required a very long course of therapy before they were fit to take up their duties once more. There are better ways of getting information."

"I guess we'll have to agree to disagree then," Dumbledore sighed.

"For what it's worth Albus, I wish you the best of luck and I promise that I will act if you bring me proof."

"You just aren't willing to exert yourself."

"Not on their behalf," she agreed with a curled lip, "be honest with yourself Albus. There is nothing suspicious about either of these deaths. Of the suspicious ones, can you name one person who didn't deserve it?"

"Everyone deserves a second chance Amelia," Dumbledore maintained. "Even them."

"Do you know what the historic meaning of the word 'outlaw' is Albus?" Amelia tried a different track. "It is someone who has been deprived of the benefit and protection of the law. As far as I can tell, every one of the 'dodgy' deaths has earned the title of outlaw and as such their deaths do naught but fill me with joy."

"I see . . . what would it take for the use of your equipment and facilities?"

"The case files, forensic labs, and such?"

"Yes."

"My budget could use a bit of padding," Amelia mused, "but what I'd really like is a new prison. I really don't like having to depend on dementors."

"Agreed," Dumbledore sighed, "in return for the use of your equipment, I Albus Dumbledore agree to use my influence to give you a bit of padding to your budget to be used on new equipment, training, and to increase the number of Aurors."

"And the prison?"

"Is a task I agree with you on," Dumbledore said with a smile, "so no deal need be made. I will give you my support in that because I agree with you."

"We really must agree to have more conversations like this Albus," Amelia mused, "who knows what other common ground we might have."

"Doing anything on Sunday?"

"Nothing important, why?"

"I usually take tea around four if there aren't any emergencies that require my immediate attention," Dumbledore replied, "feel free to join me if you can make the time."

AN: Added the scene where Harry talks about Dumbledore because so many people speculated on the Headmaster's fate. Made a few small changes to this but it's mostly the same as the version that went into 'Odd Ideas.' Polish by bobman10000 and more by dogbertcarroll.

ubereng

"Minerva?" Professor Vector asked, "Why do those girls keep saying, 'I wanna ride the pony Daddy!'" "The way they're talking reminds me of those, uh, special pensive episodes."

"Yes, quite evocative. Do you suppose some upper years are pranking them... Or us?"

## Troll in The Castle

Harry managed to keep his resolution not to do anything to directly threaten Snape's life for about twelve hours, but he just couldn't resist after what he found on one of his jaunts through the forbidden forest.

The next morning's breakfast was interrupted by a highly distressed Potions Professor running into the Great Hall screaming his head off.

"Troll in the Castle," a badly injured Snape screamed as he stumbled into the Great Hall, "it's right behind me."

"I thought you took care of Squirrellymort?" Hermione asked, when Harry didn't answer she turned to him and raised an eyebrow.

"I'm sentimental, sue me." Harry sighed. "Without that Troll, we might have never become friends . . . besides, I just happened to have that bottle of Troll in Heat laying around and Snape really should lock up his cologne."

"So it's trying to?"

"Yep," Harry agreed.

"Rada," the Troll screamed as he ran into the Great Hall and towards Snape. "Rada rada rada."

"Professors," Dumbledore said loudly as he drew his wand, "on my mark . . . fire."

The group watched as their Professors traumatized the Hufflepuff table by covering it with a fine troll mist.

"So you did all this for me?" Hermione asked in an odd tone of voice.

"Yup."

"That's so sweet," Luna cooed.

"Yeah," Hermione agreed with a tear in her eye, "thank you Harry."

"Well our friendship means a lot to me," Harry said roughly, "just wanted to make sure you knew that."

"Which Professor are you going to attack with a bloodthirsty creature for me?" Luna demanded. "Or do I mean nothing to you."

"Yeah," Susan giggled.

"But it wouldn't have the same symbolism," Harry protested.

"I don't care," Luna said stubbornly.

"How about Um-Bitch?" Harry asked. "Been saving that one for a special occasion."

"Ok," Luna agreed, suddenly cheerful again.

"And me?" Susan mock growled. This situation was too funny for her not to get involved.

"Any requests?"

"Never did like Sluggy," Susan shuddered, "the way he looked at me."

"I didn't know that," Harry said, grinding his teeth together at the thought of the bastard who had helped make Tom such a pain to kill perving over his . . . over young girls.

"Creep," Hermione agreed.

"Well, anyway . . . do you think you could cover him in flesh eating slugs?" Susan pleaded. "Pretty please?"

"I'll see what I can do," Harry promised, "in the entire world you three are my only friends. May as well do my best to keep you happy."

"Thank you Harry," Susan said. She and Luna hugged him while Hermione gave him a chaste kiss on the cheek. "We love you too."

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Back at the staff table, Aurora and Minerva were paying close attention to the antics of the Slytherin first years.

"Look at that Minerva," Aurora giggled, "It seems that Mr. Potter's harem was frightened by the Troll and he's being good enough to comfort them."

"James would be insufferable after seeing that wouldn't he?" McGonagall asked dryly, the corners of her mouth twitching.

"Not a patch on how bad Sirius would have been," Aurora froze when she realized what she'd said, "or . . . the Sirius I knew anyway. He seemed so proud when . . . bastard."

"He's getting his due."

"One of the few things that bring me joy is the thought of him suffering," Aurora said savagely, "there's a special place in hell reserved for traitors."

"Why don't we change the subject?" Minerva suggested. "What do you suppose prompted the Hat to put those four into Slytherin?"

"The fact that there isn't anyone else willing to go to that house?" Aurora theorized. "Who knows how the enchantments have mutated on that thing, could just as easily be because one of them was the five thousandth student since some arbitrary date, or because another was born during the correct astronomical phenomena, while the third happened to have the same name as some historic Slytherin and the hat got confused and just tossed them 'back' into 'their' house."

"And the fourth?"

"Well it's obvious that Harry belongs in Slytherin," Aurora said seriously, "any boy his age that's managed to charm three girls, well . . ."

"He is a little charmer isn't he?"

"Gonna break a lot of hearts when he gets older."

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As had previously occurred, the two Professors' scrutiny did not go unnoticed, or unremarked.

"They're watching us again," Harry said out of the corner of his mouth.

"What are they saying?"

"I'd rather not cast a listening charm under their noses if I don't have to," Harry replied, "looks like something about charms . . . breaking things . . . hearts? Frigging glasses."

"Need a new prescription then?" Hermione asked sympathetically.

"Yeah," Harry agreed, "that or a pair of binoculars. Reading lips is a pain in the ass if you can't see very well."

"Why don't we stop by the infirmary before class to get you a new pair then?" Hermione suggested.

"You can do that?" Harry asked in shock.

"Didn't you know?" Hermione replied dumbly.

"Of course I didn't know," Harry said incredulously, "why else did you think I would wear these damn things?" He tapped the frames.

"I figured that you had no fashion sense," Hermione admitted with a blush.

"I thought you liked running into things," Luna volunteered.

"I just assumed that you hid some sort of gadget in them or something," Susan said reluctantly, "like in James Bond."

"How do you know about James Bond?" Hermione demanded.

"A few of the muggleborns showed the rest of us," Susan explained, "we all love . . . loved . . . will love? Whatever, we liked Q."

"Figures."

"Are you saying you don't find smart girls attractive?" Hermione arched an eyebrow at him.

Harry's eyes widened in alarm. "Are you kidding? I always thought smart girls were sexy. Look at who I hang out with!"

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Minerva grinned. "See? I told you they had him wrapped around their fingers. Look at the way he's doting on them. Probably going to have him go out of his way to do things for them too."

"Like what?"

"Pick flowers, help with homework, they are only eleven, so I doubt it'll be anything all that strenuous or complicated."

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Meanwhile, the Headmaster was busy assuring himself that his favorite project had not been harmed.

"Are you sure Severus?" Dumbledore asked in concern.

"I'm sure," Snape agreed, "I am not going to put off my classes any longer." Or give the little bastards anymore free time to study. "We put off classes once, we cannot do so again."

"Very good then," Albus said, his eyes glowing with approval. "Educating the children is the most important thing after all."

"Yes," he agreed, "educating."

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"You know," Harry said to the girls as they walked to their 'first' Potions class. "I wonder how Snape is going to handle this. Is he going to go easy on us because we're in his house or is he going to be a bastard because we aren't 'real' Slytherins."

"Bastard," Luna said.

"Agreed," Hermione said.

"Damn . . . guess I'll have to go with the other option since you two already took bastard," Susan giggled.

"S'what I figured too," Harry continued. "Now do we surprise him with our Potions knowledge or do we hold it back, advantages and disadvantages to both."

"Why don't we just wing it?" Hermione suggested.

"Whatever we can do to make him suffer an embolism," Luna said firmly, "it'd be so funny."

"I used to do that with Vernon," Harry offered, "never seemed to happen . . . I think I got close once though." The group switched to safer subjects when they walked into the potions classroom and selected their seats.

They didn't have long to wait before Snape swept into the room and fixed the students with a fierce glare, his customary sneer gracing his top lip.

"I will have silence in my class," he pronounced.

"I do not expect any one of you to understand the subtle grace that is the art of brewing potions." He allowed his gaze to sweep over the Slytherin section of the classroom.

"Especially not when standards have been allowed to drop so far, even in my own house. In fact I could teach you many things, many wonderful things, but I shall settle on cramming enough into your tiny brains to ensure that you will recognize your limits enough to leave brewing to a competent professional."

His scowl transformed into a smile. "To that end I am giving you all an exam, one that you should all be able to pass easily considering the amount of time you were given to study . . . clear your desks."

While the girls amused themselves by providing overly detailed answers, Harry passed the time fantasizing about Snape's upcoming death. Perhaps he could make a mistake when brewing one of his potions, Harry mused, or neglect to do things safely. There were so many possibilities.

"Is there something you would like to share with the rest of the class Mr. Potter?" Snape asked nastily.

"Several things," Harry agreed. "Are you sure you want to hear them?"

"Sit down and be quiet or I will assign you detention for the remainder of the year."

Harry complied with a sigh, detention would have made things easier but he was fairly sure that a child of his age wouldn't push things much further. He still had a couple weeks until Snape was scheduled to suffer an accident so it wasn't like he didn't have plenty of time to get into trouble.

"Time is up," Snape sneered a few minutes later, "hand in your answer sheets and wait quietly until after I have finished grading them." Snape went through the tests, apparently grading based on who filled them out rather than on the work done. "Take your tests and get out."

"How'd you do?" Hermione asked after a glance at her page.

"Dreadful," Harry said with a laugh, "apparently confounding the professor to mix your test up with someone else's doesn't help if he manages to switch it with someone he plans on crucifying anyway."

"Who'd you switch with?" Hermione asked.

"Gran'll kill me," Neville wailed.

"What's wrong Nev?" Harry patted Neville on the back as he stared despairingly at his potions quiz.

"I got a Troll minus. No one has ever got a Troll minus on potions before. He even took points off for the way I spell my name."

"It's not that bad. I got ahold of his old potions book and look at this." Harry held out an old and heavily folded test being used as a bookmark.

Neville unfolded it and began to snicker. "He got a Troll minus on his first one too! He marked me the same as his first one. I guess you're right, I'm not that hopeless. If Snape can go from Troll minus to teaching then I can at least get an EE."

"See," Harry consoled, "it's not so bad."

"Thanks Harry," Neville said happily, "you're not so bad. I don't care what Ron and the others say about you."

"Ron and the others?" Harry muttered after Neville had left.

"He did always hate Slytherins," Hermione mused. "I'm sure he'll come around after he has a chance to grow up."

"So . . . never then?" Susan asked.

"Probably," Luna agreed.

"Doesn't matter," Harry said with a shrug. "He's not Ron. Ron lasted four days before he spilled his guts and I spent several months spilling their guts in return. The kid is Ron's relative that happens to look like him. No more, no less."

"Eat like him, stink like him," Hermione said as she raised fingers.

"That and he's a child," Susan added, "I think Luna's probably the only one of us that won't slip up if we decided to spend more time with the 'other' children."

"Why wouldn't I slip up?"

"Because everyone knows that the whole bloody Lovegood family are a bunch of bloody nuts," Hermione said quickly.

"True," Luna agreed, "it's certainly made things easier for us."

"Slipping up's why I haven't even tried to spend time with Hannah," Susan continued. "Every time I see the kid I think about what happened before and I swear that it won't happen again. Other than that, well . . . it's not the same person. It'd be like trying to have the

same relationship you built with one of your friends with one of their children."

"No one ever said Sirius was healthy," Harry said uncomfortably, "Azkaban has a way of changing a person."

The group again switched to safer topics as they walked into the Transfiguration classroom.

"What a pretty kitty," Luna squealed. She picked up the cat she knew to be her Professor and began caressing it. "Would you like some tuna kitty?"

"I think I've got some catnip," Susan offered with a grin.

"Why are you carrying catnip?" Hermione asked oddly.

"The same reason I have tuna," Luna answered for her friend, "in case we run into a kitty."

"Oh . . . well, in that case I just happen to have some cream with me."

"I wonder when McGonagall will get here?" Harry asked as the bell rang, doing his best to conceal his amusement.

"Maybe we went to the wrong classroom," Luna mused, "and the Hufflepuffs too."

"Maybe," Harry agreed. 'Or maybe the Professor is stoned out of her mind and eating tuna while guzzling milk.' "Bit of a glutton isn't she?"

With a regal glare, the cat strode out of the room. Pausing only to send a glare over her shoulder at the son of James and Lily.

"I think you angered the kitty," Luna said with a pout.

"I think I'm gonna die if I don't get to laugh soon," Harry choked. "Why didn't you tell me you were going to do that."

"OPSEC?" Luna asked innocently.

AN: Dogbertcarroll had a scene or two that was added and he also added a ton of polish. More polish by jk, jacee4u2001,

Omake by moshehim

"What did you do, you imbolical child!" screeched the dead professor painfully. "Send me back! Send me back!"

"Oh, I fully intend to, professor Snivellus," said Harry. "In fact, that's exactly why I brought you forth from the realm of the dead, you understand."

"Oh?" exclaimed the ghostly potions professor.

'Yes, I wanted to kill you. I planned to kill you. I planned ahead - for years, coming with better and better plans, that is-", Harry explained, "-more and more painful plans and ways for you to die, I fantasied about it. Then you bastard go and get yourself blown up by a stupid potion!" Harry nearly shrieked that last bit.

Severus flinched involuntarily at that - as much as a dead spirit could flinch. He was beginning to feel glad he died...

"so now I brought you back," said Harry, "and - indeed - I will send you back to your eternal rest once more - after I had my fun!"

"Are you done with the dramatic speech yet?" asked Luna.

"ah?" asked Harry. "Oh, yes." he said sheepishly.

"Good," she said. "Then let us begin."

Over the castle painful, horrifying, gut-wrenching shrieks were heared - by the dead alone. The Bloody Baron went completely pale, as if he'd seen a ghost, which went unnoticed, as he was already pale as a ghost himself. Well, thatcomes naturally, from actually being one.

Speaking of which, Peeves found himself a new worse feer.

Three years later...

"Looney, Lupy Lupin!" said the polstergait.

"Here is a useful little jinx, class. You might want to pay attention, it may come in handy. Waziwadi!"

the gum shot off the keyhole and into Peeves's left nostril. The Polstergait floated away, plotting revenge.

"What do we have here?" Peeves wondered aloud. A monster locked in a trunk? Peeves will set it free, yes he will! ruin professor Loopey's office, it would!"

Peeves somehow unlocked the trunk and released the monster within - out came a lifesized tortured ghost of Severus Snape, shrieking in terror and pain.

Peeves soon fled in the shrieking as he fled away as if he was chased by a ghost. Which is an interesting coincidence, since he really was being chased by a ghost!

Somehow along the way, the ghost of Severus Snape had acquired a woman's robe and a tall hat with a stuffed vulture on it.

"Wow," said Hermione. "You weren't kidding back in first year when you said you were sentimental, were you?"

Harry just smiled happily.

Poor Neville now had a new shape for his bogart to take, too.

Amelia Bones, however, wasn't impressed with what "proof" Albus Dumbledore presented her with.

"Really, Albus," she said. "That is the most ridiculous cockbull story I have ever heard!"

'Poor Frank and Alice,' she thought. 'Wasting away in St. Mungus like that. How does Dumbledore come up with such foolishness?'

"What did you three want to show me?" asked Harry.

"Well, you see," said Hermione.

"-we developed a cure for over exposure to the cruciatus curse."

Luna interupted her.

"Oh, good." saod Harry. "I wasn't going to leave anyone alive to sufer after I finished torturing them, though. I suppose if someone REALLY annoyed me I could prolong it a bit..." Harry once more rue the day Nevile managed to kill Severus Snape.

"No, you lout," said Susan. "We mean it for Nevile's parents! we want you to sneak it to them in St. Mungos!"

"WHAT?" yelled Harry. "Bastard kills Snape and now he gets a reward? No way! I'm not helping him!"

"Please?" said Susan.

"No."

"Pretty please?"

"No."

"Pretty please with sugar on top?"

"Ain't gonna happen."

"How about now?"

"Hmmm..."

Somehow Susan managed to open the top three buttons in the front of her robes.

"Keep talking..."

"You see, Amelia, I told you they were behind it!" Albus said triumphantly.

"oh, stuff it, Dumbledore," said Madam Bones, "I just had it with your stupidity. Now, if you don't mind, two of my best aurus just recovered from severe ilness, and I would like ot give them a visit."

"I-"

"Not a word. And no, you can't come. And I'll post a guard to keep you away, too!"

'Well,' thought Dumbledore, at least with a guard watching over them, the two supposedly sick aurors couldn't get away with murdering anyone, could they?'

Satisfied, Albus Dumbledore sat down at his desk and plopped a lemon- drop into his mouth.

Omake by spd3432us

"Harry"

"Yes, Hermione"

"I've been thinking."

"Go on."

"Well, you know how there's all these extra muggleborns this year. How would Lucius and the other 'imperiod' death eaters have known who they were?"

"There's only one way. Mafalda Hopkirk."

"That was my thought too."

"I never did like her. Especially after she sent me a letter for Dobby's hover charm."

"I'll get the other two girls and we'll think of something special for her."

"Thanks Hermione."

## Memories

Minerva managed to sober up enough to safely transform back into a human a few minutes later and the change in mass and brain chemistry made quick work of the issues caused by her catnip overdose.

Taking a few quick breaths to steady her nerves, she walked back into her classroom and fixed them all with one of her patented stern looks.

"Good afternoon class, my apologies for the late start. Fifty points to Slytherin for always being prepared to meet a cute kitty," she said calmly, "today is your first lesson in transfiguration . . ."

Some time later, she allowed herself a brief moment of pride as the class wound to a close. Despite the rocky beginning, Minerva was confident that she had managed to inspire her new students to look on her branch of magic not as a chore to be endured for the sake of being permitted to use magic without restriction, but as a useful pleasure that would enrich their lives.

"Ms. Granger, a moment."

"Yes Professor?" Hermione asked.

"I noticed that you have no more classes this afternoon and as I am also free I was hoping that you would accept my invitation to have afternoon tea."

"That would be lovely Professor," Hermione said politely. "Thank you."

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Dumbledore was sitting at his desk when the wards indicated that a visitor had arrived and was coming up the steps.

"Good afternoon Alastor." Dumbledore stood as the man entered his office. "Have you and the others had a chance to look over the files Madame Bones was good enough to give us?"

"Preliminary finding is that ninety nine percent of them look like accidents," Moody said thoughtfully, "don't know that I agree with some of the findings the investigating Aurors made but I don't think they were covering anything up."

"I see . . . what do you mean when you say you don't agree with some of the findings?"

"Narcissa Malfoy's wand wasn't checked for spells," Moody said immediately, "the Aurors couldn't find any traces of recent offensive magic in Lucius's wand but since they didn't check Narcissa's then we can't conclude that anyone else was involved."

"What do you think is causing all this?"

"Two things spring to mind," Moody said after a moment of silence. "The first is that you are correct and there is a witch or wizard with a grudge against Death Eaters."

"And we have quite a few of those around," Albus sighed.

"But not many who fit the profile," Moody said slowly. "First, the individual is brilliant. They'd have to be to do all this without being caught. Second, the individual is absolutely ruthless. Some of the things they'd have had to do to . . ." The old Auror gave an involuntarily shiver. "Finally, the individual has a grudge against Death Eaters, a grudge so strong that the Death Eaters would have to have done something unspeakably horrible to provoke it. If they exist and they ever come after me then I'm gonna dig my own grave and wait in it til they arrive."

"Do you have a list of suspects?"

"I might be able to do it," Moody said thoughtfully. "You might, maybe a handful of others. Only a few people fit the profile and none of them are still alive. Of the people that are, none of them have that much of a grudge . . . or at least I don't think they do."

"Who fits the entire profile?"

"Several, best match is Lily Potter."

"Lily?"

"Was a stone cold bitch in a fight, lost her husband, and was one of the most brilliant witches of our time. James is a close second."

"The third?"

"Doesn't matter," Moody said firmly, "I'll write you out a list if you want but I already checked to confirm that we're sure everyone on it is dead."

"What's the other?"

"Other what?"

"Theory," Dumbledore explained.

"That there is a curse," Moody replied. "How many wizards and witches died cursing Voldemort and the Death Eaters? One or more of those curses might have stuck."

"I hadn't considered that," Dumbledore said thoughtfully, "magic is a wonderful and terrible thing. One wonders just how much of what we know is false... Thank you, old friend. May I impose on you to keep digging?"

"You may," the old Auror agreed. Finding on the other hand might be a bit more difficult. Moody wasn't sure what was eliminating the traditional Dark Families. What he was sure of was that he didn't much care, good riddance.

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The Head of Gryffindor House smiled at the student across the table as they settled down to have their meeting.

"I must say," Minerva began as she poured the tea, "that I was shocked to see you go to Slytherin rather than Ravenclaw."

"Your fault Professor," Hermione laughed, "I told the hat that I wanted to be the best Transfiguration Mistress in my generation and he had me in Slytherin before I could get in another word. The others are the same of course."

"Really?"

"Slytherin is such a small house that the Hat sends as many students to it as possible," Hermione explained, "mostly muggleborn since Purebloods have been avoiding it, what with the 'curse' and all. They see that most of the people who died in mysterious ways were mostly from Slytherin and forget that they were all supporters of the last Dark Lord. Thank you for the tea by the way."

"You're very welcome," Minerva said. She so enjoyed having a chance to speak with an equal, the fact that her guest was a young girl bothered her not at all. "Do you mind sharing why the others got in Slytherin?"

"Not at all. I'm not sure about Harry." That was a lie, Harry wanted to get conveniently close to his targets. "But Susan wants to be either an Auror or a Spell Researcher, perhaps both. And Luna wants to be the best reporter that ever lived . . . or a Zogboat."

"Zogboat?"

"I have no idea," Hermione confessed. "Luna's a rather odd girl."

"Not surprising considering who her parents are," Minerva mused. "You wouldn't believe the sorts of trouble her mother used to get into. And of the two, Ms. Lovegood's mother is the sane and level headed one."

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Harry whistled to himself as he went through Snape's office. He wasn't looking for anything in particular, well maybe a few handwriting samples since suicide notes are so much easier to forge if you know what they're supposed to look like. No, he was just hoping to stumble across a few things that would make it easy to arrange things so that it looked like pure bad luck. Suicide was plan B and he always hated to go with Plan B when he could find an A.

"What have we here?" Harry asked himself. "Promising," he mused, "enough to earn our friend a few years in Azkaban if it gets found by the right people . . . well, assuming Dumbledore doesn't ride in and explain how," his voice took a slightly mocking tone, "his 'good friend

Severus' would never dream of leaving the light and is quite trustworthy."

After putting everything back the way he found it, Harry erased the signs that he'd entered the office and left. He still had plenty of time to think of something, patience was the quality above all others that had allowed him to succeed so often.

He found the girls waiting for him upon his return to the Slytherin Common Room.

"Harry," Hermione began, "may I ask you a question?"

"Sure," Harry agreed, "what do you want to know?"

"You avoided us for almost ten years, why did you show up to the reunion?"

"McGonagall tracked me down on one of her better days . . ."

"Don't say that," Hermione interrupted, "she was normal most of the time. She only had her moments about once a week."

"She was a tough old bat," Harry sighed, "I'm not sure I could have come out of it half as well as she did."

"Yeah," Hermione agreed, "it was one of the uglier things I saw."

"You're lucky then," Luna said simply, "please continue Harry."

"Well, she looked me in the eye and said. 'Mr. Potter, I have had enough of your foolishness. You will attend and you will spend time with your friends.' Then she slapped the invitation against my chest, glared at me and told me I wasn't too old to get a detention if I crossed her."

"She said that," Hermione giggled.

"When I pointed out that I was no longer in school, she told me that I wasn't too old to be put across her knee. Glad I went," he continued. "To be honest, I was kind of afraid that you guys would greet me the same way the rest of our old classmates always did."

"How's that?"

"Oh god, not you . . . grrarg."

"You think you were the only one that got a little unofficial justice after the war?" Luna asked calmly.

"I figured one, maybe two, Death Eaters on average from some of the survivors," Harry admitted.

"Hermione killed at least twelve people," Luna said calmly, "she'd call parents in for conferences and dose the tea. Once she pushed a pair down one of the moving stair cases. Susan arranged for five Death Eaters that had been given pardons in exchange for agreeing to work for the Department of Mysteries to suffer a rather large accident. I assigned myself to investigate any... sensitive cases I came across and I... well, I wasn't known for making arrests."

"I bet that went over well, half your bloody co-workers were collaborators."

"The other half were young enough to have relatively clean hands," Luna said calmly. "One of them once asked me if I could beat the whole Department in a duel."

"Kids. What'd you say?"

"That I would only be able to kill about ten of them before they took me down," Luna said with a serene smile, "and then Harry would come home to kill the rest of them . . . and their families . . . friends, pets, neighbors, and so on. Several plans had to be canceled at that point, pity for them."

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Hagrid was confused and despite what some would say, that was not his normal state of mind. Sure it was true that there were things in the world that he didn't understand but he didn't tend to dwell on them, deciding instead to concentrate on things he did understand like his creatures. That in fact was the source of his confusion, young Harry's eyes looked very much like some of the more . . . cuddly creatures.

"Makes sense," Hagrid rumbled, "Harry's a good lad. Just like Fluffy and the others, makes sense that they'd be the same." Hagrid nodded to himself, he was aware of what other people said about his friends and was well aware of what their teeth and claws were designed to do, he just lacked the natural fear that most beings had. There were few things in the world that were a danger to a half giant, it was easy to understand Hagrid's attitudes with that in mind.

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Hermione smiled as she watched Ron struggle through the levitation charm, it brought back so many fond memories.

"Like this." Hermione grabbed Ron's wrist and forced it thorough the correct motions. "Your pronunciation needs work too but I think most of your problems are stemming from your imprecise wand movements."

Ron stewed through the rest of charms class and could hold it no longer once he was out from under the Professor's direct supervision.

"It's no wonder she got sorted into Slytherin," Ron said nastily, "she's a nightmare."

"Ron," Hermione said sweetly. "That's no way to talk about a lady," she finished with a right cross.

"Oof." Ron went down clutching his bleeding nose.

"Shall we go then?" Hermione asked her friends. She kept her mouth shut until they were out of sight. "Took him forever but Ron finally gave me a real apology for what he said," she said conversationally, "adding that if he could then he'd go back in time and break his younger self's arms for saying such a terrible thing. I of course told him I thought it was a bit harsh so he replied that a broken nose would be as nice as he'd be."

"Just doing Ron a favor then huh?" Harry asked tightly.

"It was a week before . . ." Hermione trailed off. "I had to do it."

"That's right," Luna agreed, "you did. That's why I get to punch him in the nose the next time he makes a cruel remark, Susan can be next, then it'll be Harry's turn, and you can start the whole cycle again after Harry."

"We sure we want to do that to him?" Hermione asked. "He's not going to learn his lesson any time soon and if we hit him enough we're going to start causing brain damage."

"Ron's got a hard head," Susan said with a giggle, "and he's got nothing important in it to damage . . . now his stomach on the other hand, we wouldn't want to hurt that."

"He'd never forgive us," Luna said seriously. "Which reminds me, I heard the most remarkable rumor the other day."

"Is it the one about all of us being in Harry's Harem?" Susan snorted. "Why can't they just mind their own damn business."

"That's the one," Luna agreed, "I'm just wondering if we want to go along with it . . . well, pretend to anyway."

"Could be a fun way to play with their heads," Hermione agreed, "and it would save us the trouble of having to turn down dates in a couple years."

"Are you sure you want to do that?" Harry asked with an odd look on his face.

"Why do you ask?"

"Sorry," Harry said, "I just thought . . ."

"Thought what?"

"Well, rumor had it that the three of you all had . . . uh . . . special people who got killed by Death Eaters."

"What of it?"

"Wouldn't you like to start dating them again?"

"Not a chance," Hermione sighed, "they aren't the same people for one."

"And lustng after children is a bit odd for another," Susan said firmly.  
"Eh Luna?"

"I don't know," Luna said as she favored her friends with a sultry look, "aren't I lust worthy?"

"Let's not go there Luna," Hermione said firmly. "You're all knobby knees."

"You look a bit underfed too," Susan said critically, "not as bad as Harry of course."

"Of course."

"I don't look underfed," Harry protested, "I've had plenty to eat."

"I'll bet your diet hasn't been the best though," Hermione said critically, "what have you been eating?"

"Whatever I want."

"But not enough fruits or vegetables I'll bet."

"Probably cold take out," Susan added, "eaten while watching his targets and plotting their demise."

"Maybe we should take him to the nurse?" Luna suggested. "And she'll talk to the house elves and he'll only get rabbit food to eat."

"You look underfed too Luna," Harry warned.

"But I'm not," Luna said with a smirk, "so I'll be eating real food while you eat what food eats."

"My revenge will be swift and bloody," Harry said with a straight face.

"No it won't," Luna replied, "you love us too much to do that."

"But I'd be deranged from having to eat rabbit food," Harry pointed out with a grin.

"True," Luna mused, "but I was always a better duelist than you were."

"You got one bloody win on me and refused a rematch," Harry protested.

"I didn't want to hurt your feelings by beating you again," Luna said with a superior smile, "I don't think your fragile little mind could have taken it."

"Who uses a bloody cooking charm in a duel?"

"It worked didn't it?"

"Very creative," Harry agreed, "saved my ass in Singapore."

"You were the one who took Ming the Merciless?"

"He wasn't nearly as tough as I was led to believe," Harry replied, "but he had this henchgirl who . . . bloody frightening. She went into this martial arts routine, bouncing and jumping everywhere while spinning her wand like a bloody baton."

"How'd you beat her?"

"Used a non stick charm on the floor, she landed on it and broke her ass bone. A quick stun and bob's your uncle."

"Stun?" Hermione asked in disbelief. "Harry?"

"She looked pretty stunned when she noticed that her intestines were wrapping around her head," Harry said smugly. "Caused by a spell that was much more useful than one might think."

AN: Not planning any pairings for this, above conversation was mostly so I could toss out a few ideas. Polish by jacee4u2001 and dogbertcarroll.

## Revelations

Harry was skipping down the hallway towards the dungeons for his first Potions Class. The boy was positively giddy with anticipation.

"Time for Potions class," Harry cheered, "come on guys. It's time for Potions."

"Today's the day huh?" Hermione asked with a yawn.

"Not yet," Harry said cheerfully, "still have a couple weeks to set things up."

"Wouldn't want to miss his last few lessons," Susan mused, "coming Luna?"

"Of course." The blond girl assumed her customary place in the group.

They walked down to the Potions classroom and, at Harry's insistence, sat at the front table.

Snape's lesson was nothing special, the man blathered on about an assortment of less then interesting things and didn't even have the common courtesy to do the 'silly wand waving' speech.

Harry tuned it out as he prepared the stage for a little accident for his 'favorite' Professor. Harry never was very good at potions, he imagined people saying, he messed up every one. Three weeks of work and bam, Snape would be no more.

Harry's plotting came to an abrupt end when it was Neville's turn to turn in his attempt at brewing a potion and that was when things went wrong, horribly wrong. Harry could only stare with a look of shock on his face until events had taken their course. After everything had been resolved, the girls led the nearly catatonic Harry back to the Slytherin Common Room.

"God damn it," Harry screamed after the door closed and he'd assured himself that they were alone. "I can't bloody believe it."

"Stop sulking," Hermione ordered. "It's your own fault."

"It's not," Harry snapped, "and that's the problem. You try spending as much time as I have planning Snape's death and see how you like it when your plans are foiled."

"I still say that Neville deserved it," Luna said serenely, "both for what happened in the last world and for what happened in this one."

"It wouldn't have been so bad if Neville had actually done it," Harry whined, "but all he did was hand in an assignment that looked good. That's all he frigging did, Snape died because he's an idiot and because Neville somehow managed to brew an exploding potion that just happened to look and smell like a perfect hair growth potion."

"I think it works out," Susan tried to console her friend, "look at it this way. Snape died because he's a bastard, he dropped Neville's 'perfect' potion and it exploded. How were you planning to kill him?"

"Well . . . something similar," Harry admitted with a small grin. "I was going to drop a Potion on him and watch in 'horror' as it dissolved his skin."

"You see?" Susan cooed. "Snape was going to die anyway and in a similar fashion."

"But I was gonna make it slow," Harry protested. "Do you know how painful it would have been for the bastard?"

"Were you going to do it in front of all the students in the first week of class?"

"No," Harry admitted.

"You see, it ended up being a good lesson on safety, "Snape was never all that important anyway."

"I guess you're right," Harry sighed, "you'd think I'd have learned to deal with disappointment after the life I've lived."

"You gotta admit," Hermione said in an attempt to cheer the boy up, "the look on his face when the potion exploded was priceless."

"And he did die slow," Luna added quickly, "if I'd have known that you wanted to do it your self then I wouldn't have taken so long to get the Healer."

"How'd you explain that?"

"It's my first week," Luna said innocently. A tear trickled down her face and her breathing became ragged. "I got lost." The group laughed at Luna's puppy eyes. "I . . . didna . . . mean . . . for . . . Professor . . . Snape . . . to . . . die." Her face was twisted into a fair approximation of sorrow.

"They bought that?" Hermione demanded between giggles.

"Gave me a passing grade in all my classes till the end of the year too," Luna said proudly. "Because I've been so horribly mentally scarred."

"Hmmm, I just had a sudden thought." Harry scratched his chin.

"What is it Harry?"

"I'm gonna be really annoyed if I find out Neville's parents defied Snape three times," Harry replied, "really really annoyed."

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Minerva finished with her business in the Hospital Wing at record speed and immediately went to find her colleague to share the newest bit of gossip on the lives and times of the cast of their favorite soap op . . . er, the Slytherin first years.

"Did you hear?" Minerva asked.

"Terrible about Severus . . ." Sinistra agreed.

"Not that," Minerva said impatiently, "the way Mr. Potter's Harem reacted."

"Do tell," Sinistra prompted. An eager look replaced her fake look of sorrow at the loss of a valued comrade.

"One of them rushed for help . . . can't blame the poor dear for getting lost, she tried."

"And?"

"And the other two took things rather badly, their poor shoulders were shaking so much."

"Go on."

"They both had their faces pressed into young Harry's shoulders," Minerva giggled, "then when Ms. Lovegood returned they all went back to their dorms."

"What a little charmer."

"Never hesitates to turn things to his advantage."

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The next day, the four children walked into the Great Hall to find a new Professor occupying Snape's old seat. Upon seeing Harry's smug grin, the three girls began watching the figure intently, not wanting to miss the festivities.

"Students," Dumbledore began, "I'd like you all to give a big Hogwarts welcome to our new Potions Professor Horace 'The Chameleon' Slughorn." Dumbledore was more then a bit surprised when the students spontaneously applauded. He would have been even more surprised to learn that the reason for that applause was due to the fact that the announcement had been taken to confirm the rumor that Snape had shuffled off the mortal coil. "Er . . . right, Professor if you could give us a few words."

"Thank you Headmaster," Slughorn said with a smile, "first of all I'd like to." He stopped with an odd look on his face. "Where did all these flesh eating slugs come from?" He said nervously. "No . . . no . . . graaakkkkkkk."

"Not wasting any time are you Harry?" Hermione asked with a grin.

"Not giving Neville a chance to beat me to it," Harry replied with a dirty look at Neville.

"Uh . . ." Dumbledore looked down at the corpse. "May I have your attention? Professor Slughorn is very tired so he's resting. For a completely unrelated reason, we find ourselves once again in need of a new Potions Instructor. Any requests?"

"We want Umbridge," Luna said loudly. More quietly, she turned to Harry. "And I want my turn."

"I promised to attack a Professor with some sort of creature for all of you and I have every intention of doing it."

"Thank you Harry," Susan tearfully embraced her friend. "I really appreciate that." The other two girls giggled and joined the four way hug.

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Minerva and Sinistra observed this latest chapter of their favorite school drama and neither woman could let the incident go without comment.

"There goes Mr. Potter's harem again," Minerva said with a grin, "it's almost like he plans these things."

"James would have been beside himself," Aurora sighed, "and Lily . . ."

"Are you still in contact with Remus?"

"No, we were never all that close. He was Sirius's friend not mine . . . or at least we thought Sirius was his friend."

"No sense dwelling on the past."

"True . . . do you think I should send him a letter? To let him know how things are going with Harry I mean."

"I think he'd like that," Minerva agreed, "I could send it if you don't wish to."

"No . . . no I can do it, thank you for the suggestion Minerva."

"Not at all."

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Dumbledore walked into his office and froze, he had a feeling that he was not alone. Slowly, his hand crept towards the concealed wand he kept in his garter belt.

"Good afternoon Albus," a sinister voice rumbled.

"Alastor?" Albus asked in relief. "Thank you for coming."

"I can't find anything mysterious about your pet's death," Moody said, "so don't bother asking."

"And the other?"

"Aside from the mysterious appearance of flesh eating slugs?" Moody asked with a grin. "Found an expandable jar with a loose lid in his pocket. Easy to understand why it's there considering the fact that he's a potions master . . . or was anyway."

"Thank you Alastor," Dumbledore sighed, "so there isn't any chance of foul play?"

"Plenty of chance, no evidence."

"I see . . ."

"There were some other things though."

"What other things?"

"We found something while we were searching their affects," Moody said. "Sluggy liked them young, no reason to think that he went further then looking but he was still not a person I'd like around children. Snape well . . ."

"What about Severus?" Albus asked with growing dread.

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While the Headmaster and Moody were having their meeting, our favorite band of 'heros' were having a meeting of their own.

"Rumor has it that they found a scrying mirror in Snape's quarters set to monitor the boy's showers," Hermione said with a speculative look at Harry.

"I kill people," Harry replied. "I don't ruin their reputation . . . didn't even think to."

"Don't look at me," Susan said quickly.

"I didn't do it either," Luna offered, "just think Harry. Every shower you took, Snape was watching you."

"I think I'm gonna be sick," Harry said. "I feel so violated."

"If it makes you feel better," Luna said sympathetically. "They also found a red headed Dutch wife named Lily."

"Oh god." Harry retched. "That doesn't help Luna. Even after he's dead, I keep bloody finding things out about Snape that makes me want to kill him."

"Why would you think that would make him feel better?" Susan asked.

"I didn't want to assume it wouldn't," Luna replied cheerfully. Which neatly paid Harry back for that time he did that thing at that place. She'd told him she'd exact a bloody revenge and this would teach him to think that it was okay to drink the last of the coffee and not makemore.

"You want me to start researching necromancy?" Hermione asked sympathetically as she held Harry's head. "Would it make you feel better to raise him from the dead and cause him unspeakable pain?"

"It might," Harry agreed, "thanks Hermione."

"And I'll try to develop some spells to torment him in death," Susan agreed, "I'm sure Luna can think of something to help too . . . right Luna?"

"Big Breasted Bixbys like to cause horrific pain to greasy wizards," Luna agreed.

"You see," Susan said gently.

"Thanks," Harry said between heaves, "you guys are the best friends a bloke could ask for."

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The very foundations on which Dumbledore had built his world had been shaken by the things that Moody had revealed.

"Oh God," Dumbledore said sickly, "I never knew."

"We'd have a very different conversation if I thought you did," Moody said simply. A shorter and much more fatal one, the safety of the children at Hogwarts was something that Moody felt very strongly about.

"I've . . . I would like you to do me a favor."

"You want me to check out your other Professors?"

"Please," Dumbledore agreed, "start with me."

"You?"

"I don't want there to be any rumors that I am playing favorites," Dumbledore said, "I want you to start with me and work your way down . . . take as much time as you need, get whatever help you need. Just . . . just make sure that none of my other Professors are like . . . the important thing is to make sure the students are safe. We can go back to our investigation later."

"Will do Albus," Moody said with a smile, "good to see you have your head on straight."

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Hermione walked into the Great Hall for breakfast and calmly noted Peter Pettigrew hanging from one of the rafters, apparently having hanged himself.

"Snape got away and I needed something to cheer myself up," Harry explained, "haven't forged a suicide note for a while but it's like riding a bicycle."

"Confessed his crimes and hung himself in remorse huh?" Hermione asked.

"Close enough," Harry agreed.

"One thing."

"Yeah?"

"You got Sluggy, isn't Peter a bit much? You don't want to have too many suspicious deaths all at once."

"I only got Sluggy so Neville wouldn't take him from me," Harry explained with a glare at the Gryffindor table. "

"And Peter?"

"Like I said," Harry said, "I needed something to cheer myself up."

"Why hasn't anyone noticed him yet?"

"Remember that spell we used that time to do that thing?"

"I hardly think we need to worry about being prosecuted for a crime that hasn't been committed yet," Hermione said with a smile, "one that can't happen because of a number of other crimes committed by an as yet unknown person or persons."

"It's still good to stay in practice," Harry said with a grin.

"I suppose," she agreed, "well?"

"The spell drops in the middle of breakfast and so does Peter."

"Bit more elaborate then usual isn't it Harry?"

"Had to make up for Snape," Harry replied, "everyone needs a hobby." And if he'd timed things just right, the bowels would release

a little something extra into his least favorite (surviving) Professor's morning porridge. Well, assuming it was one of the rare occasions she decided to show up anyway.

AN: Polish by rankokun, Brad Coleman, jacee4u2001, bannerfirefly, Nicholas Dorn, brian892671, daregirl75, and R.B.

## The Land Downunder

Neville was enjoying his breakfast more than any other he'd ever had in his short life. It had all started when he'd sat down to find his usual place surrounded by large portions of all his favorite foods. It had continued when the seats around him were filled by an assortment of his favorite girls. And it had gotten even better when dozens of post owls had delivered a mountain of letters and packages each congratulating and thanking him for his role in the destruction of the 'Dark Lord of Hogwarts.'

As one can imagine, the whole thing had done wonders for the boy's burgeoning confidence. The only thing to mar what was shaping up to be a perfect day was the strange corpse with a rope around its neck that appeared over the Professor's table and voided its bowels onto the rarely used seat belonging to the Head of the Divination Department.

"My god," Minerva whispered, "that's Peter Pettigrew."

"You can tell who he is at a glance while he's hanging there after having been missing for over a decade," Aurora asked skeptically.

Minerva flushed with embarrassment. "He has a scar on his left hand that I gave him when he surprised me in his sixth year. For some reason my animagus form's instincts took over and I bit him."

"May I have your attention students," Dumbledore said loudly, "it appears that someone has decided to prank us all with a Halloween decoration . . . and . . . um . . . why don't you all return to your dorms to have another day off?"

"Do you realize what this means Aurora?" Minerva said. "Sirius is innocent."

"Oh god," Aurora gagged, "what have we done." She collapsed into the older woman and began sobbing, it was as if her entire world had been destroyed.

"We'll have to get him out of that place," Dumbledore tried to console the woman, "we can put him in the Ministry holding cells or the secure ward at St. Mungos while we investigate."

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The group was in high spirits as they strolled back to the Slytherin Dorms.

"And that is that," Harry said with a lazy grin as they all made their way back to the Slytherin dorms.

"I thought putting it above Trelawney's seat was a nice touch," Susan offered.

"Yeah," Hermione agreed, "pity she wasn't there . . . what?" She added upon seeing their shocked looks. "I really didn't . . . don't like her."

"I suppose that someone constantly predicting your death would get annoying after a while," Luna agreed.

"Not to mention that whole 'by the hand of the other' nonsense," Susan added.

"Who's next on the menu Harry?" Luna asked. "Are you taking requests?"

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Amelia was waiting in the Headmaster's office along with the entire staff of Hogwarts when Poppy came to deliver her report.

"It's Peter," Poppy said in a professionally calm voice, "no doubt about that."

"So we have an innocent man in Azkaban," Dumbledore said sadly.

"We have a man innocent of one of the things he was charged with," Amelia corrected, "I have my people digging through the records department to find the transcripts of his trial and the evidence assembled against him. Since it was a war time case, I'm going to need your signature to authorize unsealing the records Albus."

"Yes of course," Dumbledore agreed quickly. "How are you going to get the Minister to sign it?" He added with a grin.

"As Head of the DMLE," Amelia began with a smile, "I don't need to ask for it. Two signatures from top level officials are all that's needed if I say that I was opening it to explore the possibility of adding more charges."

"And so long as appearances are maintained you may do whatever you wish after the documents are unsealed," Dumbledore said with a twinkle in his eye, "nicely done Amelia."

"Thank you Albus," the woman said with a nod, "I have already ordered Black to be transferred to one of my holding cells while we carryout the investigation and . . ."

"May I see him?" Aurora interrupted.

"I'm afraid not," Amelia replied, "at least not until we've had a chance to . . . well, you have to understand that after spending a few years in Azkaban . . ." she trailed off. "Why don't you wait until we've established all the facts in this case before getting your hopes up?"

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Sirius was laying in his cell doing the exact same thing he did every day since he'd been picked up by the Aurors. It sure was lucky he was a dog animagus, Sirius reflected to himself, or else he'd never be able to contort enough to lick his own . . . he froze when his sensitive canine hearing picked up the sound of footsteps approaching his cell. With an annoyed whine, Sirius transformed back into human.

"It's your lucky day Black," the guard said with a grin, "you're going on a trip to the Ministry."

Sirius allowed his tongue to slip out the side of his mouth and plastered a stupid look on his face, the same stupid look he'd perfected in his second year during Transfiguration class when he should have been studying.

It was composed of 30 percent Hagrid faced with someone afraid of a dangerous creature and 70 percent Snape looking at an ethics question on an exam. It never failed to make him look harmless and clueless and had once almost convinced Lilly that he hadn't had anything to do with the latest prank.

"Get him up," the other guard sighed, "and wipe that drool off his face."

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Back in the dorms, our four protagonists were using their less than limited resources to 'study' the situation.

"Well?" Harry asked. "What's going on?" The foursome had retired to their dorms where Hermione had the bright idea of remotely accessing the stenography spells in the Headmaster's office.

"They aren't used much anymore," Hermione had explained to the others, "not for the last hundred years or so. We started using them again after Minerva's ordeal, it wasn't hard to modify them to alert us when she 'needed assistance.' Nor it seemed was it difficult to access them remotely.

"They're releasing Sirius from Azkaban," Hermione relayed to the group, "Sinistra wants to meet him . . . and uh . . . nothing else worth passing on."

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Amelia stepped out of the interview room with a look of extreme displeasure on her face. "Move him to the secure wing at St. Mungos," she ordered, "and be sure that he is treated with kindness and respect."

"He's innocent then?" her assistant asked with a look of shock on her face.

"I'm afraid so," Amelia agreed.

"I'll see to it Madame Bones."

"Have three of our people with him at all times," Amelia continued, "I don't want there to be any accidents."

"Accidents ma'am?"

"One of our own got sent to Azkaban without a trial and I am going to get to the bottom of things. While that happens I do not want our most important witness to disappear. We failed him once. We will not fail him a second time!"

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Minerva nodded when Sinistra flashed a hand signal asking to meet after the meeting had broken up. She followed the other woman to the teacher's wing and into Aurora's quarters.

"I need your help," Aurora blurted.

"Oh."

"I need to pretty myself up a bit," Aurora confessed, "it's been years since I put on any makeup or worn anything more flattering than a sensible teacher's robe."

"And just what makes you think that I'm any better?"

"Your seventh year girls always look good," Aurora replied, "I thought that you'd been giving them pointers."

"I have not."

"Then could you have them help us with this, please."

"When did it become we?"

"Minerva." Aurora looked close to tears. "I didn't even go to the trial."

"Fine," McGonagall broke, "let me figure out how I'm going to explain this."

"Thank you Minerva."

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The three girls followed Harry through the night darkened halls of Hogwarts castle, wondering what had been so important that it required awakening in the middle of their normal sleeping hours.

"What did you want Harry?" Hermione demanded, a bit cranky that her beauty sleep had been interrupted.

"Yeah," Susan agreed, "why are you dragging us all to an unused part of the castle in the middle of the night?"

"I believe I made a promise to Luna," Harry said with a grin.

"You mean?" Luna squealed. She clapped her hands in excitement and for once looked and acted her age.

"Yep," Harry agreed, "I always keep my word." Harry led them to the top of a stair case and checked his watch. "Any time now."

"What are we waiting for?" Hermione asked.

"Listen," Harry said. They strained their ears and heard the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs. "Could you hand me that box please?"

"Here you go Harry," Luna said cheerfully, "what's in it? A horrible flesh rendering monster of some type."

"Not quite," Harry said with a grin.

"Hem hem, what are you children doing out of your dorm room?"

In reply, Harry just opened the box to let its prisoner escape. Umbridge screamed as Neville's toad leapt out of the box and smashed into her face.

"Arg," she screamed as she tumbled backwards down the winding stairs.

"Accio Toad," Harry said calmly, before flicking the spell away to allow the larger creature to resume plummeting and casting it again, this time specifying 'Accio Smaller Toad', saving Trevor from a nasty fall. A quick charm confirmed the fate of their latest Potions Professor and Harry turned back to the girls with a grin. "Eh?"

"Oh Harry," Luna sobbed, "it was beautiful."

"What's going on here?" Minerva asked as she walked up to the group.

"Madame Umbridge was helping us look for Neville's toad," Hermione said. Her face contorted in an effort not to laugh. "And . . . and . . ." She gave up trying to control it and thrust her face into one of Harry's shoulders.

"And Madame Umbridge fell down the stairs," Susan took it up. "Is she dead?" Susan put in an award winning performance as a worried little girl while Luna still had tears running down her face, overwhelmed by how far Harry would go to make her happy.

"I'm sure that she's just resting," Minerva said calmly. "Why don't you take the girls back to your dorms Mr. Potter."

"Yes Professor," Harry agreed.

"You're excused from classes tomorrow," Minerva added as the group walked away, "just stay in your dorms. I'll have the house elves deliver your breakfast."

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With an annoyed sigh, Dumbledore stood up to address the Great Hall the next morning to announce that there was yet another staff vacancy that needed to be filled.

"May I have everyone's attention please," the Headmaster said loudly, "due to a recent . . . uh . . . condition, Madame Umbridge is unable to continue her position as Potions Professor." He ignored the group of seventh years checking the dead pool to see who won, he was unable to ignore the way Minerva cackled as she collected her winnings. "Minerva?"

"Like taking candy from a bunch of half wits," Minerva chuckled to herself. "And speaking of half wits, I believe that you owe me something Sybil?"

"My inner eye must have been on the fritz this week," the woman grumbled.

"Are you trying to welch on our bet?"

"No, I'm trying to explain how I lost it."

"And?"

"And I'll post a public admission that Divination attracts the weak minded by tomorrow."

"Thank you Sybil," Minerva said sweetly, "was there something else you wanted to share with us Albus?"

"Uh . . . just that I'll be taking over Potions classes until we can find someone that doesn't regard the position as an automatic death sentence."

Dumbledore was a bit upset, at least with the curse on the DADA position you could get a year's work out of them and as a bonus could skip paying them at the end, a net gain for the school he felt, but this curse was just too disruptive to the school curriculum. Something had to be done!

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Harry was reading a book in one of the more comfortable chairs in their plush common room when he felt another warm body plop down next to him.

"Harry, can we speak with you for a moment?" Hermione asked with a pensive look on her face.

"About what?" He turned to see the look on her face. "Oh, one of those discussions." Harry Potter laughed at bogarts, it was the best way to get rid of them, but even if it wasn't, he had mastered his response to fear long ago in either timeline, but a female wanting a serious talk still had his male DNA screaming 'retreat'!

"Afraid so," she agreed. "I've been talking to the others about something."

"Oh," he asked nervously.

"Yeah, it's just . . . do you ever get tired of it all?"

"Of what all?"

"All the killing," Hermione replied, "doesn't it bother you?"

"It's the only thing I've ever been good at," Harry said uncomfortably.

"That's not an answer."

"No," Harry agreed with a sigh, "it's not." He found himself worrying about losing his friends all over again. Was he too callous for them?

"Well?"

"What else would I do?" Harry demanded. "Work a job at the Ministry? As long as we live in this country I have to do my best to make it safe for all of you. I can't... I can't let these vipers slither around when I know it's only a matter of time before they do something stupid and put one of you in danger."

"My uncle owns a cattle station in Australia," Hermione said slowly, but with a growing hope that Harry would agree, "it's a Commonwealth country, they speak English, great beaches . . ."

"So you want us to work for your uncle?" Harry asked.

"Another thing about Australia," Hermione said with a grin. Harry was usually good at hiding his emotions but she'd known him long enough to catch the brief flash of hope in his eyes. "Land is cheap, we could all buy ourselves a little place the size of Ireland."

"And raise cows?"

"Sheep, whatever." Hermione shrugged. "Maybe just kangaroos or koalas, who cares. It'll be quiet and far from here, does anything else matter?"

"Luna and Susan are on board with this?" Harry asked softly.

"We've been talking about it for a week," Hermione agreed, "haven't worked out any of the details. We also agreed that it's all or nothing, if you don't want to go then we don't go. None of us . . . we're all just . . ."

"I understand," Harry said, "I like having friends again too."

"So . . ."

"So tell me more about Australia," Harry said with a grin. "What do the others think of it?"

"Luna likes the animals, Susan and I like the beaches and the fact that it's about as far from here as you can get without leaving the English speaking world. What do you like about it?"

"I like the fact that you guys are going," Harry said, "and the fact that Dark Lords aren't exactly common in that part of the world."

"Oh?"

"Had a couple contracts in that area," Harry explained, "not all that many and none of them had the level of competence that Draco achieved by his second year."

"So why'd they call you?"

"Because they were evil bastards and the locals didn't have the stomach to put them down," Harry said calmly, "same reason I got called in on most jobs. Because I'm willing to do things that turn a well adjusted individual's stomach."

"Speaking of that, is there anyone here you want to send off before we retire?"

"Few politicians," Harry said with a careless shrug, "no one too important."

"It's settled then," Hermione said with a satisfied smile, "the others will be so happy to hear that you agreed."

"When do we want to go?"

"As soon as we finish our NEWTs," Hermione said firmly, "education is important after all."

"Seven years?"

"As if," Hermione giggled, "as far as the world is concerned we're all prodigies remember? You're the 'boy-who-lived,' Luna's a girl genius, I'm one step away from my PHD, and an insane spell developer has chosen Susan to be his heir. It'd be suspicious if we all stayed in school half that long."

"So end of the year then?"

"That or the middle of next. We do plan on making some contacts with past friends before we leave, because there is still a good chance they'll grow up into the friends we remember."

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Neville limped into the nurses office a bit stiffly. He'd been ambushed by a pair of third year Slytherins and some of the lipstick had taken a bit of effort to remove.

"Madame Pomfrey?" Neville said nervously. While the metric ton of thank you notes he'd gotten from current and former students for the accidental extermination of the 'Dark Lord of Hogwarts' had boosted his confidence, deep down he was still the shy boy that had first boarded the Hogwarts Express.

"What is it child?" she asked the Gryffindor first year.

"I think there's something wrong with Trevor," he said holding out his toad. The poor creature's eyes stared off into the distance, as if he had seen and done things that no toad should ever experience. "He's not running off like he usually does, he just seems to sit on my bed quietly."

"There doesn't seem to be anything wrong with him," she said thoughtfully, "maybe a bit of vitamin deficiency . . . why don't you give him a few extra meal worms with his meals and maybe a couple of mosquitoes for flavor."

"Okay."

"He's probably sticking to your bed because he realizes that it's where you live."

"Then why did he run off before?"

"Because he wanted to explore the area," she said with a smile, "now run along then and be sure to come back if you have any problems."

"Thanks Madame Pomfrey," Neville said cheerfully.

Trevor rubbed his front legs together, wondering if the oil from the greasy witch he'd landed on would ever come off.

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The teachers looked up as Dumbledore walked into the meeting room and took his place at the head of the table. Something was off, the old man almost looked . . . broken.

"My friends," Dumbledore said to the collected Hogwarts staff. "I've asked you here to deliver a confession. I allowed myself to fall into a very dangerous trap, a trap which I think many of you can understand. Minerva, what do you first think of when I mention Molly Weasley?"

"A nervous little girl that wet herself on the train," McGonagall said immediately, "why?"

"Because I've been teaching so long that I see not the witches and wizards that people have become but the children that they were," Dumbledore sighed, "I find that it has . . . hindered my ability to be objective."

"That's where I come in," Moody interjected, "Albus has asked me and a few of my old coworkers to take a look at all the current Professors." He ignored the outraged shouting. "Starting with him, found a few shady things in his past but nothing that worried me. Found a few shady things in all yer pasts but nothing that bothered me. Current Professors are mostly worth keeping. The last few were scum and their fates don't bother me none."

AN: Lots of polish by dogbertcarroll. More polish by Tommy King, fhacklander,

## Buttonhole

Aurora paced back and forth in the St. Mungos lobby while she waited for clearance to visit the newly exonerated Sirius Black.

"Sit down and stop fidgeting," Minerva ordered.

"I can't help it," Aurora protested, "I need to burn off this nervous energy somehow, so it's either this or I suppose I could burst into tears."

"I wouldn't recommend the second option," Minerva sighed, "not sure I could fix your make up."

"Remind me to thank your seventh year girls again later," Aurora said quickly. "What am I going to do Minerva?" her voice wavered.

"I would suggest talking to him."

"But what if he hates me?" Aurora wailed. "What if . . ."

"We can not allow ourselves to be bogged down by what ifs," Minerva said sharply, "whatever will be, will be."

"I suppose."

Both women looked up as the door opened to admit the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement.

"Amelia," Minerva said calmly.

"Minerva, Aurora."

"Amelia."

"I hear that the two of you would like to visit a patient that was admitted to the special dignitary wing," Amelia said calmly, "why?"

"Sirius and I were . . ." Aurora bit her lower lip. "Very close friends."

"Oh?"

"We . . . we . . . I thought . . ."

"They had an understanding." Minerva chose to rescue the younger witch, "About how their relationship was going to progress if they both survived the war."

"I see," Amelia sighed, "I suppose it wouldn't hurt to escort you up to his room to ask if he's willing to take visitors."

"Is he..." Minerva tried to find a gentle way of asking if Sirius was sane.

"Most of the time," Amelia offered, "there are good days and bad."

"I see, after you then Amelia."

"Right this way."

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Harry and the girls filed into the Defense Against Dark Arts classroom, eager to find out who Dumbledore had found to take the position and even more eager to see if another name might get crossed off their list.

Harry was disappointed and the girls were intrigued to find out who it was.

"My name is Mad Eye Moody," Moody growled his introduction, "and I'm gonna be yer Defense Professor for what's left of the term . . . possibly the rest of the year." His gaze swept the room and locked onto Harry, there was something about the boy that screamed menace to his battle honed senses. "You, Potter."

"Yes Professor?" Harry asked with just the right hint of confusion in his tone.

"Never mind," Moody grunted.

"Alright Professor," Harry agreed. He gave the man a reassuring smile. "If you say so."

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Amelia stepped out of Sirius's room and nodded to the two women.

"So he's agreed to see us?" Minerva asked.

"He's agreed to take visitors," Amelia said with a frown, "and he let it slip that he'd throw his bedpan at anyone he didn't want to see."

"We'll be sure to duck," Aurora said with a poor attempt at a smile.

Minerva strolled into the room as if she owned it and fixed the man in bed with her patented glare number three.

"Slacking off again eh' Mr. Black?"

"Didn't think I'd ever see you again Professor," Sirius said with a grin, "how have you been."

"It's been quieter with you gone," Minerva said honestly, "or at least it was until the Weasley twins enrolled."

"Trouble makers?"

"Almost as bad as you and James," Minerva agreed.

"Good to know that someone has taken up the standard." The grin fell from Sirius's face. "I have a question for you Professor."

"What is it Mr. Black?"

"Is Aurora doing well?" Sirius asked slowly. "Is she happy?"

"Why don't you ask her yourself." Minerva glanced over her shoulder to the woman in question.

"Aurora?" Sirius croaked.

"Sirius." Aurora had tears flowing down her face, ruining her make up. "I'm so sorry."

"Why don't I leave you two alone for a few minutes?" Minerva suggested.

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Sweat poured down Moody's face as he stubbornly resisted the urge to pull his wand. He didn't know what it was but his danger sense screamed louder and louder the longer he resisted it.

"You, Potter."

"Yes, Professor."

"Dodge this." Moody flung a stunner at the boy. He almost missed it when the boy hesitated for a split second before dodging out of the way. He did miss the fact that three girls drew their own wands and held them ready under their desks. "Good work," Moody laughed, "ten points to Slytherin." The Potter boy had the reflexes of a well trained duelist. His spinning eye caught two of the three girls stowing their wands. "Make it twenty," Moody added. He tried to ignore their outward appearance to see how the children held themselves.

"Thank you Professor," Harry said with a grin.

"Hmmm." Moody squinted at the class, now all he had to figure out was why the four first year Slytherins moved like wolves in a land of sheep, like they knew that they were the most dangerous beings to walk the school, like Moody himself had before loosing his leg. "Interesting," he muttered to himself.

"What's that Professor?" Hermione asked.

"Jest talkin ta meself lass," Moody said with a horrific grin. Very interesting.

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Aurora stuck her head out of Sirius's room. Some of the top few buttons on her shirt were in the wrong holes, her hair was mussed up, and she was a bit flushed. Upon spying Minerva, she waved her colleague over.

"What is it?" Minerva asked with a poorly concealed grin.

"Could you come in here for a little while?" Aurora asked with a blush. "We need a chaperon."

"Oh?"

"Sirius had me talked out of my top five buttons before I remembered where we were," the woman admitted.

"I see," Minerva chuckled, "good to know that Azkaban didn't change him too much."

"Minerva," Sirius said seriously, "I need to ask you something."

"What is it Sirius?"

"Amelia told me that Harry was at Hogwarts."

"And," she prompted.

"How's he doing?" Sirius said quickly. "Is he fitting in with the other Gryffindors?"

"He's doing fine," Minerva assured the man, "though to my disappointment he was not sorted into Gryffindor."

"Takes after Lils then," Sirius sighed, "guess Ravenclaw isn't so bad."

"Not that one either," Aurora giggled.

"Hufflepuff?" Sirius said weakly.

"Slytherin," Aurora corrected the man, "to stay with his harem."

"Slyth . . . wait, my godson has a harem?" Sirius perked up. "Takes after his godfather then," he said proudly, "tell me about this harem of his."

"Amelia's niece, Selene's daughter, and a muggleborn girl. The four of them are the brightest students to walk the halls of Hogwarts in decades."

"Four . . . so Harry does take after his mum a bit too," Sirius said with a shrug, "would have been better if he was a bit more like me, but I suppose that no one's perfect. They are pretty right?"

"They're first years," Minerva said with a smirk, "but they look like they'll grow up to be real beauties."

"Heh." Sirius's face adopted a smug expression. "I'm the man."

"What did you do?" Aurora asked despite herself.

"My manliness obviously affected Harry," Sirius boasted, "causing him to form a harem. Damn, even I didn't know I was that good."

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Harry and the girls returned to their dorms and immediately went to their safe room. Convenient but not surprising that the Slytherin dorms had one, a bit surprising that it had come with a thick layer of dust, evidence that the place had been forgotten and fallen into disuse. It was child's play to update the wards and remove the outdated monitoring charms connected to the Head of House's office to make the place suitable for their needs.

"What's up with Mad Eye?" Susan asked.

"What's up is that he's going to get himself killed if he tries that again," Luna said calmly.

"He knows that something strange is going on," Harry said with a shrug, "we need to find an easy explanation."

"There's an old dueling hall in one of the unused towers," Hermione offered, "complete with interactive training dummies."

"We let him catch us going to and from it and that's that," Susan agreed.

"And we'll have to keep going to it till we leave or he does," Harry added. "Not a complaint, just an observation."

"Be good to get back into shape," Luna mused, "and it'll be good to beat Harry again."

"One bloody time," Harry growled.

"And how many wins do you have against me?" Luna asked in a lilting voice. "Hmmm, it was none wasn't it?"

"Just you wait," Harry said with a frightening look on his face, "I've picked up a few tricks over the years."

"As have I," Luna agreed, "not to mention the advantage Susan has now that she has two legs and Hermione's unparalleled knowledge of charms."

"This is gonna be fun," Hermione said, shocking the group. "What, I like a little of the ol ultra violence every now and again myself."

They all dissolved into laughter at that statement and it was several minutes before their conversation could proceed.

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The Marauder's Map, while an impressive bit of magic, had been created by a group of students. It was nothing compared to what those same students could have produced as adults with years of experience under their belts, nothing compared to what could be produced by a Master Auror with decades of paranoia and practice.

Moody was sitting at his desk staring at what appeared to be a miniature version of Hogwarts, detailed down to the last brick.

"Interesting," Moody muttered as he followed the student's routes as they went through his doll house. "Very interesting," he corrected himself as he saw what spells were being used. He'd give it a couple days before he 'discovered' their practice location . . . nothing overt of course, maybe just disturb some of the dust or move a piece of furniture. To be sure, Moody checked the last week and confirmed that the Slytherin first years hadn't used the old dueling room in the past. The old Auror wasn't sure just what he'd found, but he was sure that there was more to the foursome then met the eye.

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Harry and the girls let their lives fall into a routine. They went to class during the day and practiced during the evening, being very careful to hide the fact that they were anything more then a group of

extraordinary first years. The weeks passed and it was winter holiday in what seemed like no time at all.

"Any plans for winter break?" Harry asked the girls. "If not, would you care to take a suggestion?"

"What is it Harry?" Susan asked.

"You remember how the goblins were?" Harry asked. "Their power is derived from the gold they have under their care, take the gold and their power is broken."

"Do you have a place to move it?" Luna asked.

"Yeah," Harry agreed, "I do."

"Where?"

"The Gnomes of Zurich are great bankers," Harry replied.

"Gnomes instead of goblins?" Susan mused.

"They aren't really gnomes Susan," Hermione said, "they're . . ."

"Actually, they are," Harry interrupted, "Illuminati gnomes, dedicated to world domination. They aren't so good at world domination, but they're wonderful bankers . . . oh, and they like to steal underpants."

"What?"

"They seem to think that if they steal enough underpants then they'll get profit and world domination," Harry said with a shrug, "no clue how that's supposed to work, has something to do with a renegade gnome called Happosai, but they got me a killer interest rate."

"Would you do me a favor Harry?" Luna asked suddenly.

"Of course," Harry agreed, "what can I do for you?"

"I need Dumbledore to be kept busy with something for a day or two after we go home for winter holiday." Luna batted her eyelashes. "Do you think you could do that for me?"

"With a little help from our resident poisoner," Harry agreed, "what do you say Hermione?"

"I suppose we could slip him something to keep him busy," Hermione mused, "and I just happened to have developed a variant of lysergic acid diethylamide that should do the trick."

"Thank you ever so much," Luna cheered.

"What do you need it for?"

"Your interest rate gave me an idea," Luna said with a mysterious smile.

"Yeah?"

"I just thought that it would be polite to make sure that everyone knows about it," Luna giggled, "I wonder what would happen to the Goblins if there was a run on the bank."

AN: Meant to get this out sooner, just been busy with a few things like Finals week (odd to do as a teacher) and a trip up to the DMZ-JSA. Polish by dogbertcarroll and zambkptkn.

## Bailout

Dumbledore smiled down at the students that had chosen to stay at the castle over the holidays.

"I ergaaaaaaaaaaa." The old man collapsed and was aware of nothing else for quite some time.

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Luna skipped into the pressroom and plopped down on her father's lap. Fixing the man with an adoring gaze, she opened her mouth and made her request.

"Father," Luna began.

"What is it buttercup?"

"I am not buttercup father, I'm Luna."

"Are you sure?"

Luna took a moment to examine herself. "Fairly sure father," she agreed.

"Then what is it Luna?"

"May I have the key to our Gringotts' vault so I can empty all the gold out?"

"Of course you may," he agreed. The man took a few minutes to look through his pockets. "Ah, here we are."

"Thank you father."

"Any time buttercup."

"Luna father, not buttercup."

"Right."

|||||||||

Susan walked into her aunt's study and did her best to look like a child that was trying to look like an adult. To be honest, the sheer mechanics of it all gave her a headache.

"Aunt Amelia, may I speak with you a moment?"

"What is it Susan?"

"I just wanted to know why we keep the family gold at Gringotts when it would be safer and more profitable in other banks."

"What do you mean by that?"

"It explains it all in this handout," Susan chirped, "I heard about it from my friends."

"Be sure to thank them then," Amelia said absently as she read over the hand out.

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While Luna's father thought nothing of handing his daughter the key to the family vault, it was only money after all, Selene Lovegood had a very different view of the matter.

"Alright young lady," Luna's mum said. "You are in big trouble."

"I am?"

"You are," she agreed, "now you will put the gold back in Gringotts and . . ."

"I won't."

"You will."

"Won't."

"Will."

"Won't."

"W . . ." She sighed, it appeared that she'd been a member of the Lovegood family a bit too long. "Ok then, why don't you give it to me so I can return it then?"

"No, I won't."

"Why not, honey?" she tried a different track.

"My name is Luna Mummy, not honey."

"Ok." She took several deep calming breaths. "Then why not, Luna?"

"Because it's fine where it is."

"But it needs to be in a bank so it will be safe."

"It's in a bank mummy."

"So you put it back into Gringotts?"

"No mummy, I had it transferred."

"Where?"

"To one of the Gnome banks in Switzerland. They have nine point four five percent interest there and that's much better then what we had at Gringotts."

"Oh Luna, the goblins only charge two so it's much better to put our gold back into Gringotts."

"Not charge mummy," Luna said innocently, "they give us a few percent if we let them guard our gold." It was a bit more complicated than that but she saw no reason to blow her mother's fragile little mind.

"Give?" the woman asked dumbly. "You're sure?"

"Here's the brochure mummy," Luna said happily.

"Oh . . . good job Luna."

"Thank you mummy." She really did love having her mother back but really, the woman had no common sense at all. "Do you think that other people would like to know how much better the gnomes are mummy?" she added innocently.

"Good idea darling, I'll put an article in the next Quibbler."

"My name is Luna mummy," she sighed, "not darling."

"I know that Luna," the woman said with a smile, "It's just . . ." she bit her lower lip as she tried to find the words to explain terms of endearment.

"Are you feeling okay mummy?"

"I'm fine Luna."

"Because they say that the memory is the first thing to go," Luna said in concern, "maybe it would be good to get you to a healer."

"That won't be necessary Luna."

"If you say so mummy," Luna said sceptically. She made a mental note to ask Susan to send her a senility detection charm. Luna had lost her mother, then gotten her mother back, and now she'd be damned if she lost the woman again.

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Hermione sat her parents down and looked at them while she tried to figure out how she was going to broach the subject.

"What is it darling?" her father asked.

"How attached are you to England?" Hermione blurted.

"What?"

"Would you be willing to relocate to another country?" Hermione asked.

"Why ever would we do that darling?" her mother asked.

"Mum," Hermione sighed, "I just want you to seriously consider it. If you find that you'd be willing to go then we'll talk about it."

"Do you want to move abroad hon?" her father asked cautiously.

"No," Hermione said, "I want you to come with me."

|||||||||

Though limited in readership to the more "open minded" segment of the population, the news on the front page of the next issue of the Quibbler quickly spread and a large crowd formed before Gringotts the next morning.

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The first hint that the goblins had that something had gone wrong was when they threw open the doors to Gringotts and were nearly trampled by the crowd that poured into the bank.

"No more withdrawals," the branch manager screamed. He'd just gotten word that the same scene was being replayed at Hogsmead and at every other annex around the British Isles.

The security goblins tightened the grips on their poleaxes when they took in the mood of the crowd.

"Give us our money," one of the crowd screamed.

"I'd be delighted to," the manager said nervously. He was uncomfortably aware of how close he was to being lynched. "But I'm afraid that we have a break in the tracks." He took a deep breath. "Come back in two hours and you'll be able to withdraw everything you want."

"I'm not going anywhere," someone screamed.

"As you like," the manager agreed. So much for his first plan of getting the humans out and barring the doors. He stormed back into his office. "Get me a senior Ministry representative now," he hissed.

|||||||||

Harry was in the false ceiling over Fudge's desk when the first aide rushed in and woke up the Minister. The-boy-who-killed had originally planned to lower a bit of cord to the Minister's mouth as a means of poisoning the pathetic dick. As he listened, Harry's plans changed. Never interrupt an enemy when they're making a mistake (or an arse of themselves).

"You're sure about this?" Fudge asked.

"Yes Minister," the flunky agreed, "we can use the gold in the Ministry vaults to keep Gringotts solvent."

"And they'll pay me . . . er . . . us back with interest?"

"Yes Minister," the flunky agreed.

"Make it so," Fudge ordered. His thoughts already on what he would do with his share of the take.

"Yes Minister."

|||||||||

The Branch Manager stepped back into the lobby to address the unruly mob.

"Attention," he plastered a fake smile on his face which looked horrific to the assembled wizards and witches, "we have managed to temporarily resolve the problem we had with the mine carts and you may resume your withdrawals."

His 'smile' became more and more strained as account after account closed. Even with the injection of Ministry gold, Gringotts would still be hard pressed to cover all the accounts.

A few hours later, he sighed in relief as the last of the humans trickled out of the bank and the security goblins closed the doors.

"How solvent are we?" he demanded.

"We have a bit less than five thousand Galleons left," the flunky replied.

"What?" the branch manager snarled.

"Nearly every account was closed," the flunky said quickly, "the Ministry accounts are the only significant ones left open."

"And we drained those."

"Yes sir."

"Who else left their accounts open?"

"The Minister, Dumbledore, and a few minor officials."

"Do we have enough to cover them?"

"No sir."

"Pity."

|||||||

Harry tossed another piece of caramel corn into his mouth as he continued to watch the developing drama below. Wouldn't do to duck out and miss any of this would it?

"What do you mean our accounts are empty?" Fudge screamed.

"It took all the gold in the Ministry accounts to cover the withdrawals," the goblin said calmly.

"Where the hell did all that gold go?" Fudge demanded.

"Loans," the goblin replied, "much more productive to put money to work rather than let it sit idle."

"How in the hell am I supposed to make pay tomorrow?" Fudge moaned.

"I might have a suggestion," the goblin said with a feral smile.

"Yes?" Fudge asked.

"It's just a temporarily measure until we can refill our vaults of course," the goblin continued.

"How much is it going to cost me?" Fudge asked with a sigh.

"Simply make a Ministry Loan to the goblin nation, interest free and we shall say no more about the matter," the goblin replied.

"Not a chance," Fudge said quickly. No way was he going to let that opportunity for graft slip through his fingers.

"We could of course add a 'consulting fee' for you," the goblin added.

"Why?"

"The Goblin nation has decided that it has an unacceptably low liquidity," the goblin began, "to that end we have concocted a scheme that we believe will refill our vaults."

"What is it?"

"We will refund three years of interest to anyone that pays off their debts in full," the Goblin said with a grin. It was an article of faith in the goblin banking industry that the humans were holding back gold. "Two years for anyone that will pay off half their debt and so on." They'd sell off their offspring for a deal like that, any goblin would have.

||||||||||

There was a score of enraged workers outside Fudge's door the next day, all demanding to know one thing.

"What in the hell is this?" one of the lower level clerks bellowed. "Paper, you expect us to accept our pay in paper."

"Those are Ministry backed Galleon Certificates," Fudge said quickly, "they're just as good as gold."

"They're bloody worthless is what they are," the man replied, "give us or pay."

"If you want gold then you need only go down to Gringotts and exchange them for . . ."

"We bloody well tried that," another flunkey screamed, "they told us that they would no longer allow withdrawals of hard currency."

"I'm sure this is all a misunderstanding," Fudge said in an oily voice, "if you'll just give me time to . . ."

"No pay no work," the man said in disgust. He pulled off his Ministry issue robe and threw it on the ground.

"Yeah," another member of the crowd agreed.

"What he said," a third screamed.

"Wait a minute," Arthur raised his voice to be heard over the crowd. He looked over at Fudge. "If you'll give us a minute Minister."

"Of course," Fudge agreed. He was trembling in relief. "I'll be in my office."

The angry mob waited until Fudge left before turning to Arthur.

"What's your game Arthur?" one of the men demanded.

"Yeah," another agreed.

"My friends," Arthur began with a grin, "it occurs to me that we've got ourselves an opportunity."

"Go on."

"Well." Arthur's smile deepened, he wasn't normally one to take advantage of a situation like this but . . .

|||||||||

Fudge nearly wept with relief when they told him their terms and he immediately signed his agreement. In exchange for the rest of the week off, thirty thousand galleons in scrip each, and the promise of receiving hard currency at some point in the future. They agreed not to burn the Ministry to the ground and hang the Minister from the

nearest light pole, it was an agreement thought fair by the majority of the participants.

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The Branch Manager smiled as he saw the line form in front of the accounts receivable desk. He'd never doubted for a minute that his plan would work.

At the front of the line stood Arthur Weasley, ready to take on the debt that had impoverished generations of his family.

"And how much would you like to pay this month?" the Goblin asked with an oily grin.

"All of it," Arthur said proudly.

"But the interest payments alone."

"Should more then cover the rest of it," Arthur interjected, "three years right?"

"Fine," the goblin sighed. They'd never expected the humans to scrape up enough gold to pay it all off.

"Here you are," Arthur said as he slid a pile of scrip across the table, "I even included a bit extra for you."

"What is this?" the goblin asked sickly.

"My family debts," Arthur replied with a feral grin, "take it. Just as good as gold you know."

The Branch Manager's world collapsed when he saw how the humans were paying their debts. They weren't supposed to do that, they weren't supposed to be able to do that. Hell, there wasn't even supposed to be that much paper in existence, only enough to cover the Ministry's pay roll.

AN: Polish by The Wombat and dogbertcarroll

SCENE or OMAKE: ubereng

Albus Dumbledore looked up from his copy of "Out" magazine. He soon spotted the disturbance near his office door. A scruffy gray rat was twitching nervously and looking right at him.

"Fawkes," Dumbledore said, indicating the rodent to his pet, "Lunch!"

Fawkes was not thrilled with his "master's" dietary choices and vowed revenge for later. Nevertheless, he sprang from his perch and dived at the indicated pest.

Startled, the rat squeaked but did not run. Instead it blurred and expanded into a pudgy pale man. Just in time to get a serious gouges on his left cheek.

"Stop! Call him off!"

"Incarcerous," Dumbledore answered. "Pettigrew?"

"Please, he'll kill me. You must help me!" The man, called Peter Pettigrew, answered.

"Nonsense. Fawkes has stopped and we can regrow your scalp."

"Not your damn turkey! Him! The demon! The 'Curse of Slytherin'! He says he'll give me a peaceful painless death only if Sirius is given a fair trial this week." Pettigrew was visibly trembling and there was a yellow puddle at his feet. Dumbledore thought he could almost see fear boiling off him.

"He also says," Pettigrew continued, "'That the supreme mugwart'...His words, not mine ... 'That the supreme mugwart has yet to determine how painful his death will be.' ... He said that 'Second chances

should start with the GOOD guys - especially those that never got a trial in the first place'."

As Dumbledore stood there, trying to decide what memories to oblivate Pettigrew with, his fireplace roared to life. "Albus!" Professor Sprout called, "There's a swarm of reporters here! They say they have evidence that Peter Pettigrew is alive and in your office!"

Reunion OMAKE Sergey Tsvetkov

If Neville's potion killed Snape, then Dumbledore might want to expel

Neville as too dangerous. Of course Amelia insisted that expelling was

decided by Wizengamot, not Dumbledore himself.

And another one interesting consequence of Harry's killings was the fact that most of the remaining Wizengamot members were not Slytherins. Of course they still were purebloods and many of them were bigots, but they have children or grandchildren that had been unfortunate to attend Hogwarts when Snape was a professor there.

"So Wizengamot is clearing Neville Longbottom by this decree."

Dumbledore looked very annoyed. "The next issue..." Wizengamot secretary

gave him a parchment. "is petition for rewarding of... WHAT?"

"What is it, Dumbledore?" Amelia was quite annoyed with Chief Warlock's behavior.

Headmaster continued with a weak voice: "...rewarding of Neville Longbottom for inventing a new painkiller potion..."

"I thought it was explosive?" someone shouted.

"Oh, it's also a painkiller. Two in one." proudly said Isolde Twickstwister who was a curator of St. Mungo...

It was the morning of October 31st, and all of the students were

already looking forward to the feast scheduled that evening.

None of the faculty had the slightest idea that the room containing the Philosopher's stone had been obliterated the night before by conscientious first years. As even the debris of the mirror containing the stone had been vanished, there wasn't anything anyone could use to try to retrieve the stone.

The first hint that Dumbledore's and Voldemort's plans had been irrevocably derailed was the note in what looked like blood on the wall over the staff table. It read:

"Dumbledore - The next time you hide something I want to destroy in a school full of children, you will have to bury some of them.

Hagrid - You should know better. Fluffy needs to be taken for walks daily."

Ikari Shinji

Harry: \*stops heading towards the door when the goblet of fire belches out another paper.\*

Dumbledore: "Narcissa Malfoy, Lavender Brown, and the Patil Twins?"

Harry: "YES! IT WORKED!"

Dumbledore: "You did this Harry? You want them to compete with you?"

Harry: "Hell no! I don't even wanna participate. I wanted them to.

They have the damned hottest bodies i've even SEEN!"

Draco: "Oi!"

Dumbledore: "How?"

Harry: "Professor Lupin taught us the confundus charm so i just used

it on the goblet to let me make it think there was a fourth school

with that as the only entry."

McGonagall: "WHY? Are you just trying to suck up to them?"

Harry: "I read about this tournament in first year. First task is

always a battle against a magical creature and third is always a maze

of some kind. But the second always has swimming and if i have half a

chance of seeing those women in bikini's then by merlin i'm takin' it!"

Men and boys of Hogwarts: \*bowing to Harry's Genius\*

Ikari Shinji

LOL! Tonks is 6 years older than Harry, why not put her into the

harem rumors too? that'd be funny.

Tonks: "Mum! I'm not dating..."

Andromeda: "Now i know that the Potter men are curse with enormous...

things..."

Tonks: "...they do?" \*drooling slightly\*

Andromeda: \*ignoring her\* "...after all the few times i slept with

James he made me unable to walk for several days..."

Tonks: \*glazed eyes and drooling\*

Andromeda: "...and i know how unbelievably wealthy they are what with

that 250 room Potter mansion in Westchester..."

Tonks: \*panting heavily with a flushed face\*

Andromeda: "...but he's too young for you despite the fact that

you're almove guarenteed multiple orgasms from..."

Tonks: \*gives out a suspiciously orgasmic scream before fainting on the floor\*

Andromeda: \*smiles evilly\* "Just you wait Lily. Our dreams of being

sisters will come to pass..."

## A Cunning Plan

Luna spent most of the next morning preparing to execute the next stage of their cunning plan.

"Look what I found mummy," Luna called out. She was wearing a set of robes that were several sizes too large.

"What did you . . ." It took most of her mother's will power to keep from squealing at how cute Luna looked in her old Ministry Uniform.

"What is it mummy?" Luna asked.

"It's my old uniform," Selene replied.

"Uniform?"

"I worked for a Department in the Ministry before I married your father," she explained, "I wonder if it still fits."

"Try it on mummy," Luna commanded.

"I don't know . . ."

"Pleeeeease," Luna begged, her large grey eyes enhancing the 'puppy dog eyes' technique till it was just short of the Imperius in power.

"I don't suppose it could hurt," Selene murmured. She took the old robes from Luna and threw them on over her normal clothing. "A bit tight," she admitted ruefully.

"Daddy come look," Luna called out.

"Luna don't," Selene said. She hurriedly tried to take off the uniform, not wanting her husband to see how much her body had changed over the years.

"No mummy," Luna said stubbornly. She grabbed her mother's hands. "Hurry, daddy."

"What is it dar . . ." His eyes bulged when he saw what his wife was wearing. "Luna, be a good girl and go play somewhere else for a few hours."

"Can I go look at the printing press?" Luna asked.

"Of course," he agreed.

"Don't play with it," her mother called after the retreating girl, "it's dangerous."

"Mmmm," her husband agreed as he wrapped his arms around her waist.

"What's gotten into you?"

"Seeing you like that reminded me of how we met," he muttered, "I can think of worse witches to be trapped in an office with over the weekend."

"I've gotten fat," she complained. "It just doesn't fit right anymore."

Taking in his wife's lush figure and the way too tight uniform she had on clung to her he leered and replied, "Well then we should get you out of those tight robes as quickly as possible than."

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Fudge glared at the goblin seated across his desk hating the fact that he had to deal with the disgusting creatures.

"Our contract specifically states that the Ministry loan to the Goblin Nation is to be paid back in Gold," Fudge blustered, "I will not accept that."

"You have to," the Branch Manager growled.

"Not according to our agreement," Fudge said smugly.

"What are we supposed to do with this?" The goblin waved a handful of Ministry Scrip. "No one will exchange it for gold and it's too rough to make good toilet paper."

"I wish I could help you," Fudge said with a shrug, "but I have troubles of my own."

"What if I were to give you a solution for your woes?"

"Then I might be willing to use it to prop up your bank again," Fudge said with a smirk, "provided my consulting fees are paid."

"Of course," the goblin agreed.

"What's the plan?" Fudge asked.

"Tax season is coming up," the goblin explained, "simply take off ten percent if they pay early."

"Ten percent is . . ."

"Worth it if it solves our problems," the goblin snorted.

"True," Fudge agreed.

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Fudge's wife walked into Gringotts and straight to the currency exchange counter.

"We're not exchanging for Galleons," the goblin said sourly.

"Wonderful," the woman said with a grin, "I would like to exchange Galleons for Ministry Happy Bucks."

"What?"

"The certificates that they've been handing out," Madame Fudge explained, "I want to buy them."

"How much do you have?"

"One thousand Galleons," she replied.

"Alright," the goblin agreed. It carefully counted out a stack. "Here you are."

"I don't think you understand," she said with a grin, "I don't want to exchange one for one. I want to buy all of them."

"But the face value is . . ."

"Irrelevant," the woman interrupted, "every business I passed on the way here had a sign proclaiming that they would not accept Ministry Scrip and it's too rough to be used as toilet paper, so it is completely worthless."

"You tried using it as toilet paper?" the goblin asked curiously.

"Indeed. The chance to wipe your arse with the minister's face was tempting and almost worth the galleons the paper is listed as being worth."

"True," the goblin admitted, ignoring the scowls and looks of horror on the faces of the script.

Her smile deepened, she had him over a barrel and he knew it. "Do we have a deal or not?

"Deal," the goblin said sourly.

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Luna felt a great sense of satisfaction as she looked down at the neat stack of Ministry Scrip. It was sometimes so useful to have access to a printing press and the knowledge of how to use one. Her original plan had been to dump piles of it on the street, that plan had changed when she and the other girls had received word from Harry.

"Oh this will be ever so much fun," she squealed to herself.

The faces on the script seem to agree as they smirked and twirled their pencil thin Snidely Whiplash mustaches.

Luna gathered the counterfeit currency into a large sack with a galleon symbol on it (sometimes it was best to play to tradition), before tossing a handful of floo powder into the fire.

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Fudge's wife was sitting at a darkened table in the Leaky Cauldron. She was soon joined by another woman.

"Sue?" the other woman asked.

"Yep," Fudge's wife agreed, "Herm?"

"Uh huh," the other woman agreed. She looked around the room. "Where's Harry?"

"He's keeping an eye on Fudge," Susan replied, "nice disguise."

"Thanks," Hermione replied with a grin, "I took the hair off Fudge's secretary."

"I knew the face looked familiar," Susan laughed.

"Who are you?"

"His wife."

"My condolences."

Both the girls had a good laugh at that.

"Luna on the way?"

"Nope," a manly but rather weedy voice interjected, "she's already here."

The two girls turned to stare into the piggy eyes of Minister Cornelius Fudge.

"Luna?" Hermione asked in shock. "Is that you?"

"It is Hermione," Luna agreed. "I don't think I like having male equipment," Luna added thoughtfully. "But I am grateful it's too small to get in the way like Harry's did that time when I polyjuiced into him to provide an alibi."

"Oh . . . well . . . do you think we should set up shop?"

"I think we should," Luna agreed. She raised his voice. "May I have your attention everyone," Fudge called out. "As you know, we are offering a substantial discount to everyone that pays their taxes off fully."

"I don't have more then half what I owe," a voice called out.

"That's fine," 'Fudge' assured the crowd, "give me half now and we'll pay your taxes off in full while you watch."

"What's the trick?"

"No trick," 'Fudge' assured the man. He turned to the bartender. "Tom, would you like to come over here so we can demonstrate?"

"Don't have much gold on hand," Tom demurred.

"Don't worry about it," 'Fudge' called out. "Come over here."

"Alright then." Tom walked over and placed a large bag of Galleons on the table.

"Let's see," 'Fudge' said, "two thousand Galleons."

"Only a third of what I owe," Tom said mournfully.

"Tell you what," 'Fudge' said with a grin, "why don't we lower our price to an eighth of your taxes?" Luna counted out a stack of Galleons and pushed the rest to Tom. "And now we'll count out what you owe." A large stack of Ministry scrip appeared next to the pile. "Put it in the envelope and . . . here is your receipt, paid in full."

Fudge's wife collected the Gold Galleons that Tom had brought. "Next?"

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A nervous flunky stepped into Fudge's office with a box full of tax forms.

"Yes?" Fudge asked.

"Tax revenue is coming in sir," the flunky replied.

"Wonderful," Fudge enthused, "how much have we got?"

"Enough paper to redo the break room walls," the flunky sighed, "no gold."

"What?" Fudge growled. "Then tell them we refuse to take paper."

"It's our paper sir," the flunky said quickly, "we have to take it."

"Like hell, what'll they do if we say no?"

"Hang us from the nearest lamp post?"

"Yes," Fudge agreed. The thought of being lynched quickly brought focus to his mind. "I suppose there is that."

"What should we do sir?" the flunky asked. "All we have is paper and there isn't a person in the world that will accept it at even a fraction of face value."

"We'll . . . we'll . . ." Fudge was hit by a sudden bolt of inspiration. "We'll make possession of gold a crime and force the people to exchange their gold for Ministry Scrip."

"That could work," the flunky agreed. Providing the people cooperated of course. "Should I begin drawing up the papers for your signature, sir?"

"At once," Fudge agreed.

'And that's my cue,' Harry thought to himself. He waited for the flunky to leave before dropping down from the ceiling

"Who are you?" Fudge blustered.

"Who I am is unimportant," Harry said with a grin. He brandished a large glass jar. "It's what this is that's important."

"What is it?" Fudge took the bait.

Harry just smiled.

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Hermione looked over the crowd with a satisfied smile. She loved getting the opportunity to stick it to the man while she was young enough to properly appreciate it, again.

"Did we get everyone?" she asked the others.

"Think so ma'am," Tom agreed. He'd never known that the Minister and his wife were such wonderful people.

"Then it's time we made our exit," Luna said with Fudge's voice, "coming girls?"

AN: Regarding the whole making possession of gold illegal thing. Don't leave reviews telling me it couldn't happen. If you think it couldn't, go read a few history books. Polish by dogbertcarroll.

## Not the Same as the Old Boss

Amelia was reading over the days reports when the floo went wild. Calls began poring in and it sounded like a hundred people were all trying to talk at the same time.

"Calm down," she barked. It was the first time she'd seen a dozen people try to call at once. "Now then, Auror Thomas first, what's this about?"

"Minister's dead Madame Bones," the woman said breathlessly.

"What of?" several scenarios flashed through her mind. It was going to be a bitch of a time if it turned out to be murder. Just rounding up everyone that had a motive would cripple the magical government, and most of the local businesses, and... really it would be simpler to try and round up anyone without a motive to kill him, if they existed. 'Probably find a crumpled horned snorcack with half as much effort as that'd take.'

"Healers say it looks like a burst ulcer."

"I see." Either natural or natural enough to safely ignore. She breathed a sigh of relief. "Anyone have something different to bring to my attention?" Six faces were left. "Auror Hawtstuf."

"Goblins are threatening war ma'am," the Auror said calmly, "something about Fudge betraying them."

"Send out the alert and cancel leave," Amelia sighed, "anything else?"

||||||||||

Dumbledore was horrified when he finally came out of his fit and Minerva apprised him of all that had happened.

"This is horrible," Dumbledore gasped, "the stability of our society itself has been threatened by the information printed by the Quibbler." The cat was out of the bag, how were they going to keep violence from breaking out?

"As you say Headmaster," Minerva said flatly, "but I doubt the Goblin Nation will be too effective."

"Oh?"

"Several families have taken advantage of the situation and used Ministry scrip to pay off their loans and taxes." A smile crept across the old woman's face as she contemplated the balance of her new Swiss account. "I dare say that the goblins will have trouble doing anything without any gold to fund their plans, their vaults are empty and they have no debts to call in."

"That's something anyway," Dumbledore admitted.

"Did you lose much Headmaster?" Minerva asked sympathetically. "Since you were unable to withdraw your gold before Gringotts closed."

"I keep the bulk of my gold in the Hogwarts Vaults," Dumbledore replied. "It's much better protected than Gringotts." Not to mention more convenient.

"Is there any reason you chose not to offer this option to the staff?" Minerva asked with just a hint of frost in her tone.

"Then everyone would have wished to use the vaults," Dumbledore explained, "best to keep it restricted. Same reason we keep separate from the muggles, if we used magic to help one then pretty soon they'd all expect us to help them." Really, it was like the woman didn't ever think about the big picture.

"I see." Her face could have been carved out of granite. "Why didn't we put the Philosophers' stone in the vaults?"

"I'm afraid I can't get into that right now," Dumbledore said quickly, "not with all the paperwork that's been piling up on my desk during my convalescence."

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Amelia looked around the table at the rest of the government. The things they'd offered, it was like her every dream was coming true,

like she'd reached the very peak of her career. Which was why it was all the more heartbreaking to have to. . .

"I would like to start off by thanking you all for offering me the position of interim Minister of Magic," Amelia began, "it is a great honor and the pinnacle of my professional career." She sighed heavily. "That is why it pains me so much to decline."

"Whatever for?" one of the others demanded.

"I'm an Auror," Amelia replied, "I know how to solve crimes and arrest criminals. I wouldn't know how to even begin to solve the mess Fudge put us in. What we need is someone that understands how banking and money works."

"Do you have anyone in mind?"

"The Prime Minister's Adviser on Magical Affairs," Amelia said immediately, "Nigel Stuffington."

"Can't place the name."

"Hogwarts class of fifty two," Amelia recited from memory, "worked at Gringotts for a couple of years before taking a job with the Prime Minister . . . also holds an advanced degree in economics from one of the muggle Universities."

"Whatever did he go and do something like that for?"

"It was needed to fit into the muggle side of things," Amelia explained, "fortunately for us eh?"

"It would just be temporary," one of the others said slowly, his prejudice conflicting with his desire to protect his assets.

"Of course," another agreed quickly, "just until the current crisis has been solved."

There was almost a sigh of relief from the august body as they successfully managed to put their love of money ahead of their desire to keep power in the hands of the purebloods alone.

|||||||||

Harry met the girls at one of his London safehouses. His cheerful mood evaporated when he laid eyes on them. They were hideous and Harry wondered for the first time if maybe, possibly, they had finally gone too far in their quest to cleanse the world of Death Eaters.

"How long before the polyjuice wears off?" he asked, resisting the urge to vomit.

"Shouldn't be long now," Luna replied.

"Would it have killed you to keep some bloody robes on?" Harry demanded.

"All this body fat makes it difficult to regulate heat," Luna said with a shrug, "if you don't like it then wait somewhere else."

"I don't like it," Harry agreed, "but I suppose our friendship is strong enough to survive this . . . would have been another story if any of you had gone as Umbridge. I might not have been able to look at you again if that had happened." He shuddered.

They all shared a laugh at that thought, well... after the dry heaves had finished anyway.

"Who is going to be the new Minister?" Hermione asked. She grabbed a new robe and stepped behind a privacy screen as the Polyjuice began to wear off.

"Was going to be Bones," Harry replied, "but she turned it down. Tough luck Susan."

"You kidding?" Susan laughed. "Do you know how much more difficult this would have been if I had to duck my bodyguards?"

"How do you know that you'd have bodyguards?" Luna asked. She grabbed a robe of her own as the Polyjuice started to wear off but didn't bother stepping behind a privacy screen.

"She assigned them for less last time around," Susan replied.

"So who is the new Minister?" Hermione asked as she stepped out from behind the screen.

"Some guy that works with the Prime Minister's office," Harry replied, "good to see you with your own face again."

"Good to have it," Hermione replied.

"How much do we have left?"

"All of Luna's counterfeits and about ten thousand in scrip," Hermione answered, "why?"

"Just wanted to know what our resources were," Harry explained.

"Excuse me," Susan said as her Polyjuice stared wearing off. She grabbed a robe and stepped behind the screen.

"Damn it," Harry sighed.

"What is it?" Luna asked as she pulled her robe on.

"I was just wishing that you girls were a few years older," Harry replied, "biologically."

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Nigel wandered into the meeting with a look of annoyance on his face. What in the bloody hell did the morons in what was laughingly called the Ministry for Magic want now? Years of resolving 'misunderstandings' had left him with very little in the way of patience for the failings of the magical 'government.'

"Please have a seat," Amelia said with a grin.

"What's all this about?" he said gruffly. "And make it quick, I've got an appointment later today that I would rather not reschedule."

"We would like you to consider taking the post of interim Minister for Magic," Amelia said calmly.

"What?" Nigel asked dumbly. "But . . . but, I'm a half-blood," he protested weakly.

"And I'm a pureblood," Amelia agreed, "what I'm not is equipped to deal with our current crisis. You are."

"What is the problem now?" he sighed. "Not another 'Dark Lord' is it?"

"That I'd have some idea of how to deal with," Amelia said with a laugh, "we're having a bit of an economic crisis."

"What sort of economic crisis?" he asked, actually finding the idea rather interesting, as he had several theories on closed societies and economic growth that he'd always wanted to test out.

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Moody waited outside Madame Bones' office for several hours before the woman arrived.

"Meeting with our new Minister then?" Moody asked.

"Yeah," Amelia agreed, "and again after he gets back."

"Where's he going?" Moody demanded. "And who'd you assign to guard him?"

"Meeting with the Muggle Government to arrange to have them loan or give us enough gold to get through our current difficulty and none of your damn business."

"Finally learned about need to know 'eh?'" Moody said with a satisfied grin.

"I was a first year Auror when I made that mistake," Amelia retorted, "that was how many years ago?"

"More then either of us would care to think about I'd wager," Moody laughed.

"What can I do for you Madeye?" Amelia asked, getting to the point.

"I'd like to exchange a bit of information," Moody replied.

"Then step into my office and give me a second to get the privacy wards up."

Moody followed his old trainee into her office and noted with approval the way she unobtrusively hit him with several charms to verify that he was not under the effect of any spells or potions.

"Well?"

"I noticed that you withdrew all your gold before the announcement in the Quibbler," Moody began, "what I want to know is why?"

"My niece got a pamphlet from one of her classmates," Amelia replied, "why is that significant?"

"Fits," Moody grunted.

"Explain yourself Mad-eye," Amelia demanded.

"You and the Lovegoods withdrew their assets around the same time," Moody said with a grin, "only other person to do so in the last hundred years is Potter."

"So they learned about all this from him," Amelia said with a frown, "so what? They are friends after all."

"So it all started with Potter," Moody explained, "but how'd he find out about all this? He's just a child after all."

"Maybe his guardian . . ." Amelia trailed off. "But how would a bunch of Muggles know?"

"That's what I figured," Moody agreed, "so I asked Albus about it."

"What did our Headmaster tell you?"

"That 'young Harry' is with relatives from his mother's side and that there is no need to check on him," Moody said with a grin, "did a bit of digging and I learned that he'd originally been placed with his aunt and uncle and that Figg was keeping an eye on him." Moody licked his lips. "Until his aunt and uncle died in an 'accident.' Albus won't talk about where Potter went after that and so far as I can tell he hasn't sent anyone to check things out."

"But he's sure that the boy's with a blood relative on his mother's side?"

"One of the people I thought capable of being behind the so called 'Slytherin Curse' was Lily Potter."

"They didn't call her the Bleeding Lilly for nothing," Amelia mused, "and there are several sets of Muggle Born cousins currently attending Hogwarts so we know that magic runs in some muggle families."

"Funny how that's only started to happen since Malfoy and his ilk finally received justice," Moody said dryly.

"Quite," Amelia agreed, "have you shared any of this with Albus?"

"Not until after I'm sure he isn't under any compulsions," Moody replied with a grin, "and even then not unless I have hard evidence."

"Would you mind doing a little more digging or would you rather I did it?"

"I'm a bit preoccupied with Hogwarts at the moment," Moody said with a blush, "not as young as I used to be you know."

"None of us are," Amelia sighed, "alright. I've got some assets I can use for this."

"Thanks, Amelia."

"No problem, Madeye." She looked up suddenly. "I'm afraid I'm going to have to cut things short."

"Minister come back?"

"That's what the wards tell me," Amelia agreed.

|||||||||

The Manager of Gringotts erupted into fury when the note from the Ministry arrived.

"They knew," the Manager hissed, "the bastards knew." He summoned his clerks, "prepare the Fudge records for release to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement," the Manager ordered.

"Sir?"

"The new Minister has changed their position and agreed to allow us to pay off our debts with Ministry scrip, Fudge must have known what would happen and has his wife buy up all the script at just above the price for the paper itself. I want to be ready to use his records in case it should prove necessary to persuade him to aid us."

"Yes, sir."

|||||||||

The news that the Ministry was offering to redeem scrip for hard currency received a much different reception at Harry's safe house.

"How much scrip did you print Luna?" Harry asked. "Enough to bankrupt the Ministry?"

"Possibly," Luna agreed, "but I wouldn't recommend we try to exchange it as ourselves."

"Why not?"

"I didn't do a very good job of it," the girl explained, "not good enough to survive more then a bit of scrutiny anyway."

"We were going to use it to pay off the taxes of anyone we thought deserved a bad turn," Hermione explained, "but we didn't get the chance."

"So we need a patsy," Susan mused.

"Still got that Polyjuice?" Harry asked with a grin.

"Enough to do what you're thinking," Susan agreed with a grin of her own.

|||||||||

Amelia was waiting in front of the Minister's office when the new Minister arrived.

"Were you able to arrange the loan Minister?" she asked hopefully.

"Easily," the Minister laughed, "I could have signed for it myself, but I thought it best to have someone else authorize it to prevent any hint of impropriety."

"Oh." Amelia was stunned by the revelation that her new boss had so much power in the muggle world. "So our problems are solved then?"

"So we've got some time to fix them," the Minister corrected.

|||||||||

Fudge's wife received a rather cold reception when she returned to the exchange counter at Gringotts.

"What is it?" the Goblin spat.

"I'd like to exchange this scrip back into Galleons," she replied, "the Ministry is offering one to one."

"And we're offering considerably less than that," the goblin retorted with a predatory grin.

"That's outrageous."

"Then go to the Ministry and exchange them there," the goblin replied with an evil smirk, "unless of course you can't, because it'd look like Fudge was using the current crisis to make a profit."

"Fine," she growled, "what are you offering?"

"How much do you want to exchange?"

"This much." She opened her valise and showed the contents to the goblin.

"I suppose I could give you . . . I don't know . . . ten thousand galleons," the goblin mused.

"There's over a million galleons here," she protested.

"That's today's rate," the goblin said with a shrug.

"I guess I could just have someone else exchange it all for me," she said slowly, "unless you've got a better offer."

"What do you want?" the goblin growled, realizing while he could make things difficult for her, he didn't have her over a barrel like he'd thought.

"I'll buy gold for two to one," she said quickly.

"Not a chance . . ."

"Three to one is as low as I go," she warned.

"Gringotts lacks the liquidity to make such an exchange at this time." The goblin frowned in frustration.

"Then I guess we're stuck," she sighed. "Unless you have something else to trade," she added, "gems perhaps."

"We might be able to deal after all," the goblin's grin returned as he thought of a way to drive a wedge between her and her husband, "provided that your husband doesn't benefit from this." Money was far more important than relationships after all.

"Give me a better rate and I'll authorize the release of his financial records."

"I think that we might be able to come to some arrangement." The goblin smiled. Being authorized to do Fudge a bad turn would put them in a much better position than had previously been the case.

AN: Tons of polish by dogbertcarroll. More by arawn\_kieve

## Old Friends

Amelia growled when she heard that the Gringotts representative was demanding a meeting with the Minister of magic, the sheer nerve of it.

"Show him in," the new Minister ordered.

"You're going to take this disrespect, sir?" Amelia asked.

"I'm going to take it," the Minister agreed, "unless throwing a tantrum will get me something."

"Understood, sir," Amelia sighed, "would it be alright if I sat through this meeting?"

"Want to make sure that I can hold my own in a negotiation?" he laughed.

"Something like that, sir," Amelia agreed. No way was she leaving him unsecured around a goblin, especially in light of several things she'd managed to learn about how Gringotts liked to do business.

"About time," the goblin sneered as it stormed into the office. It took a seat and propped its feet up on the Minister's table.

The Minister's gesture was the only thing that prevented the normally level headed Head of Magical Law Enforcement from losing her top.

"What can I do for you?" the Minister asked calmly.

"It's what I can do for you," the goblin retorted, "I'm here to talk business."

"Oh?"

"The Goblin Nation has found itself in possession of a large quantity of Ministry Scrip," the goblin said with a feral smile, "more then you can redeem."

"Interesting," the Minister replied with a placid look on his face.

"Isn't it," the goblin agreed, "I was thinking that we could hold off on redeeming it all right now for say . . . forty percent."

"Reasonable," the Minister agreed, "but I think we'll have to pass on that offer."

"What?" the goblin shouted. "We know that you don't have enough Galleons to redeem all of this Scrip!"

"No," the Minister agreed, "but we will at noon tomorrow when the Royal Mint finishes turning out my order. Feel free to come and exchange your scrip like everybody else."

"Fine," the goblin spat, "but understand that we won't settle for less than seventy percent if you can't exchange it all on the spot."

"I'm sure you think . . ." he cut off as the goblin slammed the door.

"What an unpleasant individual," he said with more than a hint of amusement, as he'd met human bankers that were cut from the same cloth.

"Yes, Minister."

"Be sure to post extra Aurors tomorrow," the Minister ordered.

"I will, Minister."

"And see if the Yard can send up an expert on counterfeiting."

"I'll see to it myself," Amelia agreed, a touch of respect coloring her tone, certain the magical world had finally gotten a minister worthy of his title.

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Hermione frowned in annoyance when she noticed the majestic white owl displayed in the window. Honestly, that boy could be so thoughtless some times.

Her frown deepened when her eyes picked up a man with hair like spun gold, but then she began to smile. One bad turn did deserve another after all.

She followed him into a gap between the buildings and carefully drew her wand after assuring herself that there were no witnesses.

"Excuse me," Hermione called out.

"No autographs today," the man said with a sparkling grin.

"Oblivate." She looked down at the drooling idiot. "Oblivate, oblivate, oblivate, oblivate." Never hurt to be thorough after all.

That task out of the way, Hermione walked back to the main alleyway and into the Owl Emporium to spring an old friend from durance vile.

She emerged from the shop a few minutes later holding two cages; one containing the aforementioned owl, and another containing a squat neurotic brown owl.

She returned to the safe house a few minutes later and fixed Harry with a fierce glare.

"What is it?" Harry asked mildly.

"Look what I found in the alley," Hermione said with a wave at the snowy owl, "how could you leave her there like that?"

"Well," Harry said, "to be honest . . . I forgot."

"How could you have forgotten poor Hedwig?" Hermione scolded.

"Years of trying," Harry said tightly, "same way I did my best to forget a good number of our classmates."

"Oh." Hermine sighed. "Sorry, I was just so excited when I saw her that . . ."

"I know the feeling." Harry opened his hands to reveal a ball of orange fuzz.

"Is that?" Hermione asked breathlessly.

"I think so," Harry agreed, "not so big now is he?"

"Not yet," Hermione giggled.

|||||||||

The Minister gave a bland smile when the Goblins arrived the next day to exchange their Ministry Scrip for gold. To their surprise, that smile didn't disappear when they revealed just how much they were planning to exchange.

"Amelia," he called out, "did the Yard send over a specialist?"

"They did Minister," she agreed, "Beauxbatons class of eighty five."

"Wonderful," Nigel said cheerfully. "Inspector, if you would . . ."

"Chief Inspector," the man mumbled as he walked up and began inspecting the bills. "Hmmm." He pulled out his seldom used wand and flicked it in the direction of the scrip.

To the Goblins' horror, the majority of their Scrip flew into the air before piling itself in one of the garbage cans.

"What is the meaning of this?" The head Goblin demanded.

"Chief Inspector," Nigel prompted.

"Counterfeits," he replied.

"What proof do you have of that?" the Goblin asked in a haughty tone.

"Besides the fact that they all have the same serial number?" the Chief Inspector asked. "Instead of the coat of arms of the ministry over the logo 'As good a gold, backed by the Minister's honesty and integrity,' the watermark was changed to a smiley face with an enormous protruding tongue, and a logo reading 'This is a fake, suckers.' How about the fact that they were printed on the wrong kind of paper and used the wrong ink. If that won't do then . . ."

"Thank you Chief Inspector," the Minister interrupted, "I think that will be quite enough. How much do we owe them?"

"Four Galleons . . . ten if you include the scrip I'm iffy on."

"Alright," the Minister agreed, "here you are gentelbeings."

"This is an outrage," the Goblin screamed, "we won't stand for this, we demand . . ."

"Madame Bones," the Minister said calmly, "if you would."

"Yes, Minister." She raised her hand and clenched it into a fist.

The Goblins were suddenly aware that they were covered by a group of cold eyed Aurors.

"Perhaps." The head Goblin licked his lips. "Perhaps we could come to some sort of arrangement?"

"Perhaps," the Minister agreed, "what are you offering?"

"Make the exchange and we'll release Fudge's financial records," the Goblin offered.

"How about you give me that information and I'll tell you of a way that you might be able to recoup some of your losses?" the Minister countered.

"D . . . deal," the Goblin said in defeat.

"Excellent," the Minister said, "turn the information over to Amelia and I'll give you my solution."

"We would also like for Madame Fudge to be turned over to the Goblin Nation for trial and eventual execution," the Goblin added.

"Afraid that won't be possible," Amelia interjected, "the body of Madame Fudge was found in her bedroom, appears to be a drug overdose."

"Fine." The Goblin flung the file at Amelia. "Tell us your information Hue-mon."

"You have numerous secure vaults," the Minister said calmly, "rent them out as storage space."

"But . . . but we won't be able to make loans," the goblin protested.

"But you will be able to make your payments to the Ministry," the Minister retorted coldly, "debts must be paid after all." His smile deepened as he watched the goblin delegation storm out of the room, he'd just fulfilled the dream of every human that had ever been employed by Gringotts.

Seeing that the situation was under control, Amelia stepped back into the shadows to have a meeting with an old colleague.

"What is it?" she whispered.

"Someone decided to oblige Lockheart until his brain started oozing out his nose," Moody whispered.

"The Author?" Amelia asked in shock. "What do you make of it?"

"Either you've got someone else running around doing bad turns to the less than wicked," Moody rumbled, "or the pretty bastard wasn't what he appeared to be."

"Check it out for me?" Amelia asked half hopefully.

"When am I supposed to do that?"

"Right," Amelia sighed, "you mind calling up a few of the old crew and using them?"

"Pay?"

"And overtime."

"Deal," Moody said with a grin, "I'll send you a bill at the end of the week."

"Appreciate it Mad Eye."

"You got any information to share about Bleeding Lily's family?"

"She had an Aunt that married an American soldier and went home with him as a war bride," Amelia replied, "Americans say that his

records were lost. A little digging shows that they had a son. Only reason I can tell that the boy even existed was a mention in the local paper, every other record was either lost or destroyed in an accident of some sort."

"Convenient," Moody grunted.

"I thought so."

|||||||||

Ron was sitting in his bedroom staring at the ceiling and trying to figure out how he was going to spend the rest of his holiday when a screeching ball of feathers burst through his window and began tearing up the place.

"MUM," Ron shouted, "there's an owl in the house."

"Take its letter and bring it down to me," Molly called back.

"I don't think it has one," Ron called back, "and you're going to need to cast some repairing charms."

"What?" Molly squawked. She stormed up to the room, captured the owl, and set everything right, with the aid of a few spells of course. "Let's see here."

A short inspection of the captured owl revealed that it was carrying a business card stating that it's name was Pigwigeon (Pig for short) and that it would like nothing better then to become Ron's post owl. Molly thought it was a nice touch that the owl had been thoughtful enough to include a coupon for a free cage and an wide assortment of owl treats on the reverse of its business card.

"Can I keep him mum?" Ron begged. "Can I."

"We'll see," Molly said indulgently.

"But, muuuuuuum . . ."

"We can talk about it after your father has had a chance to check 'Pig' for curses and hexes."

"Yes, mum." Ron sulked for the next fifteen minutes until it was time for lunch, at which time he put the whole matter out of his mind in favor of devouring as much as possible. He was a growing boy after all.

AN: Lots of polish by dogbertcarroll. More by; , ubereng, bobman10000, Chris P, Kai Korhonen, Nicholas Dorn

Braindead

Harry and the girls were looking over maps of Australia in an attempt to decide which part of the continent would become their future home when Hermione went very still as she remembered something.

"Harry," Hermione called out, "I just had a sudden thought."

"What is it?"

"What about what's his name, you know our defense professor in fourth year."

"You mean Bert?" Harry asked. "Or was it Bart?"

"Whatever," Hermione dismissed the name as unimportant, "you ever take care of him?"

"Don't remember doing it," Harry replied.

"Alright," Hermione sighed. "If you want something done right," she muttered under her breath.

"What was that?" Harry asked.

"I said," Hermione raised her voice, "would you care to accompany me Susan?"

"I'd love to," Susan agreed.

|||||||||

Amelia grinned as Moody slipped into her office and plopped down in the visitor's chair.

"What have you got for me?" she demanded.

"Looks like our 'hero' author had it coming," Moody grunted, "you wouldn't believe what they've dug up on him."

"What'd he do?"

"Aside from his . . . creative way of dodging paternity suits, something that would have merited several years to life in Azkaban if we'd found out about it when he was still kicking." Moody frowned.

"What is it?" Amelia prompted.

"He got Hammer, Johanasson, and Marks." Moody seemed to slump. "Took their stories and then wiped the memories."

"How in the hell was he able to do that?" Amelia demanded. "They may have been old but . . ."

"Drink," Moody interrupted, "least that's what I suspect."

"Is there anything we can do for them?" Amelia regained control of her emotions.

"Possibly," Moody agreed, "healers say that it's a good thing the ponce left such good notes or they'd never be able to do a thing."

"And it's a good thing for us too," Amelia added, "makes it easier to build a case."

"Against a vegetable?"

"We've tried corpses before," Amelia said with a shrug, "so the precedent is there."

"True," Moody agreed, "one more thing."

"What is it?"

"Judging by his notes," Moody sighed heavily, "judging by his notes . . ."

"There are a whole hell of a lot of people missing memories," Amelia suggested.

"Including a good number of ex-Aurors," Moody agreed.

"No such thing as an ex-Auror," Amelia said with a weak grin.

"Just an Auror off active duty," Moody finished the saying.

"Bring in anyone you need on this one," Amelia's voice was hard, "I want this taken care of as quickly as possible."

"Thanks, Amelia."

"No problem, Madeye."

|||||||||

Hermione looked down at the man that had been directly responsible for Harry's forced participation in the Triwizard. It was only through sheer force of will that she was able to stay her hand while she waited for her accomplice to signal that they were clear to proceed.

"His house elf should be out of the way for long enough to do this," Susan whispered.

"Wonderful," Hermione whispered back, "there's a plastic bag in my purse."

"Found it." Susan waved the item at Hermione.

"Could you hand it to me please." Hermione pulled the bag over Barty's head and tightened it around his neck. "And now we wait."

"Any reason we didn't just bash his brains out with a rock or something?" Susan asked.

"Trying to keep the whole 'accidents and natural causes' meme going on," Hermione replied, "at least until we're ready to leave the country."

"Still not quite as fun," Susan sighed.

"True," Hermione agreed, "but that's the price you pay sometimes."

"Shame to make it so quick," Susan continued, "in light of what he did to Harry."

"Yeah," Hermione agreed. She pulled the bag off. "How long does it take for a human brain to die of oxygen deprivation again?"

"Should be there now," Susan said, "why?"

"You think you could restart his heart?"

"Easily."

"Do it please," Hermione requested.

"Alright," Susan agreed. She cast a couple quick medical charms followed by another that confirmed Barty's ability to think had been removed. "Why?"

"Ron was dead," Hermione said tightly, "but he went on for years."

"And you figured that turn about was fair play," Susan said in sudden understanding.

"I figured that it might be best to keep the body count down a bit," Hermione said with a grin, "the job is done. No need to call attention to it."

"That's why you relied on poisons and my choice was industrial accidents," Susan laughed, "wanna go get some ice cream?"

"Lord yes," Hermione agreed, "I don't know how long it's been since I had a glass."

"Let's grab Luna and Harry," Susan added, "we'll go as a group."

|||||||||

Selene Lovegood was a very sensible woman. Well, in comparison to the family she married into anyway. She therefore found it quite surprising when a large owl burst through the window and dropped a fat envelope on her table.

A couple of quick detection charms revealed no dangerous magic and a couple of dozen slower and more thorough detection charms confirmed her original assessment.

"Once a." She dropped her voice and mumbled the next bit. "Always a." Mumble. Selene recited to herself. Even years after the war,

years after she'd left her profession, she still retained the habits that had kept her alive.

Selene's eyes bulged when she opened the envelope and found it stuffed with a stack of the new Ministry scrip. After carefully closing it, Selene marched over to the fireplace and threw in a handful of floo powder.

"Department of Magical Law Enforcement, Director Bones' Office."

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The Minister stood up as Dumbledore walked into his office.

"Headmaster," he said cheerfully, "so good to see you again."

"Yes," Dumbledore agreed, "a shame you couldn't have met with me sooner."

"Afraid I didn't have the time to spare," the Minister said with a sigh, "what with everything that's been going on."

"Yes of course," Dumbledore said glibly, "I would have been happy to assist you with that."

"And take you away from Hogwarts? I wouldn't dream of it, the children are our future and we owe it to them to provide the best education possible." Years of dealing with politicians had made him a master of spin and misdirection. "Now, what was it you wished to speak with me about?"

"It's about some disturbing new rumors that have reached my ear," Dumbledore replied.

"Really."

"I'm sure it's not true," Dumbledore assured the man, "and I'm just here to . . ."

"What are the rumors?"

"It's silly, but I've been told that you are planning to end hiring preferences for purebloods and that you're going to institute a civil service exam as a prerequisite for employment in the Ministry."

"Both of those are correct," the Minister said calmly.

"But don't you understand the harm that would do to our way of life?" Dumbledore cried.

"I see that since Amelia has begun rooting out the corrupt, the Ministry has been running better than ever despite being short handed. Imagine what will happen when we remove the incompetent and lazy."

"But don't you see," Dumbledore said quickly, "the purpose of the Ministry is not efficiency."

"What is it then?"

"The purpose of the Ministry is to provide employment," Dumbledore explained. "Now I can understand removing the corrupt." Understand but not agree with. "But the rest must stay on in their current positions."

"That's not going to happen," the Minister said calmly.

"Then transfer them to an unimportant post if you must," Dumbledore said with a wave, "the important thing is that they remain employed and that the pureblood hiring preference remain in place."

"Why must the purebloods hiring preference remain in place?" the Minister sighed.

"Because unlike muggleborn, purebloods lack the skills to find employment in the muggle world." Dumbledore gave his best grandfatherly smile. "I'm not saying that you can't hire one or two of the best muggleborn students every year. In fact, a good friend of mine once told me that the secret of good management is to hire one or two competent people for each department and then work them to death." Dumbledore's laugh trailed off when the Minister didn't join him.

"So let me get this straight," the Minister said in a frighteningly calm voice, "Hogwarts is failing in its duty to educate our populace?"

"I wouldn't say . . ."

"You've told me that I must hire incompetents because they lack the skills to succeed in the world, yes?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"And it is your duty as Headmaster of Hogwarts to insure that they are given those necessary skills, yes?"

"It is, but . . ."

"Then I'm going to have to take a very close look at the subsidies the Ministry provides to Hogwarts," the Minister said coldly, "if Hogwarts has so fundamentally failed then . . ."

"That won't be necessary, Minister." Dumbledore assured the man quickly. "Hogwarts is and shall remain the preeminent institution of learning in the magical world. We just have to . . ."

"Revisit this issue at the end of the current school year," the Minister interjected, "and if there isn't a marked improvement then . . . well, we'll just have to see won't we?"

"Minister you can't . . ."

"Afraid our time is up, Headmaster." The Minister interrupted. "I'm sorry we have to cut things off here, but I'm sure you of all people know how busy things can get."

"Yes," Dumbledore agreed sourly.

"Perhaps you should think about clearing up your schedule by dropping one or two of your positions," the Minister mused, "whatever it takes to make Hogwarts great again."

|||||||||

Selene rushed into Amelia's office and locked the door.

"Selene," Amelia said in delight, "so good of you to visit."

"Yeah," Selene agreed absently, "visit." She hit the room with a dozen privacy charms.

"Still have the old paranoia from working at that place you used to work," Amelia laughed, "guess old habits die hard."

"I just received an envelope filled with a large amount of Ministry scrip," Selene got straight to the point.

"Wonderful," Amelia cheered, "so did I."

"And I . . . wait, what?"

"Did you bother reading the note that came with it?" Amelia asked.

"There was a note?" Selene asked dumbly.

"And that's why I like all my people to spend some time with forensics and evidence collection," Amelia sighed, "you spend all your time doing ah . . ."

"Undercover type assignments," Selene suggested with a slight grin.

"Yes," Amelia agreed, "undercover type assignments and they don't even think to make a full inspection of a mysterious envelope filled with cash."

"Or rather, they consider it and, knowing that they're rubbish at that sort of thing, and choose instead to keep it as undisturbed as possible so that the professionals have a better job of it."

"Touche." Amelia shrugged. "Here's the note I got, I would guess that yours is similar."

Selene skimmed the note once and then spent another few minutes examining it more closely.

"Trust fund 'eh?"

"For Susan," Amelia agreed.

"You know who sent this?"

"What little evidence I've got suggests that the person who wrote this is the same person that saved your life."

"Mind if I take a look?"

"Be my guest," Amelia agreed.

|||||||||

Fortescue smiled as the four children burst into the shop and began chattering about the ice cream. It was why he'd opened the place, to see their little faces light up when they got their cone, made the world seem like a happier place.

"Come to a decision then?" he asked kindly when the one boy separated from the others and walked up to the register.

"All of them," Harry replied.

"What?"

"We'd like a big bowl with a scoop of everything in it," Harry explained, "with chocolate syrup."

"And cherries," Hermione interjected, "lot's of them."

"Nuts," Luna added, "I like nuts."

"And a banana," Susan added demonstrating a fine grasp of feminine logic, "so it's healthy since bananas are healthy."

"Alright," Fortescue agreed cheerfully, "how many spoons do you need?"

"Four," Harry replied.

"And how are going to pay for all this?"

Harry replied by dropping a handful of gold coins on the counter. "Is this enough?"

"Four of these are enough," Fortescue replied, "pleasure doing business with you . . ." he finally got a good look at the boy's eyes. "Harry?" he asked hesitantly.

"Yes," Harry agreed.

"You have your mother's eyes," Florean muttered. He shook his head. "Sorry about that, I'll have your order out in a jiff."

"Thank you," Harry said.

"Thank you," the girls chorused.

AN: Can't believe I forgot to post this. Lots of polish by dogbertcarroll, a bit more by bannerfirefly.

The benefits of Blarney

Selene was waiting when Luna finally decided to come home.

"Where have you been?" Selene demanded.

"Lot's of places," Luna replied cheerfully, "why do you ask mummy?"

"Where have you been today?" Selene sighed.

"Lot's of places," Luna repeated, "was there some place in particular that I should have been?"

"Here," Selene said flatly.

"But I was here," Luna protested, "and now I'm here again."

"You were supposed to stay here," Selene said in exasperation.

"But father told me to go somewhere else for a few hours," Luna pointed out, "and I was. So I really don't see why you're so worked up about all this."

"You said you were going to play around the printing press," she said weakly.

"I asked if I could look at it," Luna said with an impish smile, "I never said that I was going to stay there."

"I . . ." Selene opened her mouth to reply and then closed it. She supposed that this was the price she paid for marrying into the Lovegood family. "Fine. Why don't you tell me about your day?" She flopped down into her favorite chair.

"It was absolutely brilliant," Luna replied as she climbed into her mother's lap. "Harry bought us ice cream and . . ."

"Us who?"

"Me, Hermione, and Susan."

"That was nice of him," Selene said. "What else did you do?"

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Hermione's parents were waiting up for her when she got home.

"Did you have fun with your friends, darling?" her mother asked.

"Yes, mum," she agreed.

"Have a seat, pumpkin." Her father took a deep breath. "Where is it you were thinking about going?"

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Aurora skipped into Sirius' room and flopped into the chair adjacent to his bed with a happy grin on her face.

"Guess what I just heard," she purred.

"What is it my lovely?" Sirius replied.

"Your godson was seen in Diagon on a date with all three of his girl friends," Sinistra said. It always cheered Sirius to hear about Harry's 'romantic exploits.'

"Really?" Sirius perked up.

"Yep," she agreed, "one bowl of ice cream with four spoons. Guess he decided to take the harem out for a little treat."

"Chip of the ol' block he is," Sirius said proudly.

"Oh?"

"Not that I'm not perfectly happy with the one witch I've got," Sirius added smoothly, "can't imagine wanting anyone else when I've already got you. I'd have to say you are easily the equal of any three witches you'd care to name."

Sirius slowly kissed his way up her arm. "It takes a lot of gold veins to equal a diamond mine after all."

"Sirius," she moaned.

Sirius smirked, time to see how many garments he could talk her out of before they got interrupted again. He really needed to find a wand that worked for him so he could put a few dozen locking charms on the door. Damned nurses, always seemed to know when things were getting good. Bad enough that they all outweighed him by a considerable amount or that they were all looked older then Dumbledore, but to interrupt his sex life?

"Useless bags are probably just jealous," Sirius muttered under his breath, unaware that his nurses were relying on his sexual frustration to spur his magic into speeding his recovery time.

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Amelia came home late that night and was happy to find one of her premade meals heated up and laid out on the table.

"You didn't have to wait up for me," Amelia said as she took her seat.

"It's the only way we get to talk, Aunty," Susan replied.

"I hear that you went out with your friends today," Amelia said neutrally, "did you have fun?"

"Yes, Aunty," Susan agreed. "Harry bought us ice cream."

"Ice cream you say?"

"It was healthy," Susan added quickly.

"Oh?" Amelia looked skeptical.

"It had a banana in it," Susan said with the air of one that knew they'd just won the argument.

"Well." The corner of Amelia's mouth twitched. "I suppose that it's alright if it had a banana in it."

"How was your day, Aunty?"

"Eventful." Amelia smiled. "Why do you ask?"

"Well." Susan bit her lower lip. "The thing is, I've been thinking of taking my OWLs early and . . . the thing is . . ."

"Yes?"

"Have you given any thought to retiring?" Susan blurted out.

"What?"

"It's just . . . there are some research opportunities overseas that we're interested in and I thought it might be nice if you'd come along."

"I see."

"It would allow us to spend more time together," Susan added in a soft voice, "Hermione's asking her parents."

"I'll . . . I promise that I'll think about it."

"Oh." Susan drooped.

"And it's likely that I'll come along," Amelia added, "so long as the Ministry isn't in some sort of crisis."

"Thank you, Aunty," Susan squealed.

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Harry walked into his safe house and plopped down onto his bed. The girls hadn't been gone more than a few hours and he was already acutely aware of their absence.

"Guess it's true what they say," he muttered to himself, "you don't know what you've got till it's gone."

He went through his nightly routine, setting enough wards and traps to give a Gringotts curse breaking team pause, before he settled into bed. Tomorrow was another day and he'd be back with his friends soon enough.

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Dumbledore paced back and fourth in his office as he tried to think of a way to make the current Minister see sense, or failing that to find a way to replace the man with someone more malleable.

"You sent for me, Headmaster?" Minerva asked breathlessly as she rushed into the room. One didn't dawdle when one received a note from the Headmaster on a possible threat to the stability of the world.

"Thank you for coming, Minerva," Dumbledore sighed, "I fear that I am at a loss. I know the problem but I can think of no solutions."

"You said it was dire," Minerva prompted, "are the Death Eaters back?" She couldn't see how they would be, there couldn't be more than one or two survivors of the so called 'Slytherin Curse.'

"If only it were so simple," Dumbledore said with a frown, "Death Eaters are a problem we've faced before, a problem that I would know how to defeat."

"Oh?" Minerva let the man's statement pass without challenge, a statement that would have never stood up to rigorous examination.

"Our problem is a Minister that has no understanding of his duty to the world at large." Dumbledore shook his head. "A man with good intentions to be sure," Dumbledore allowed, "but one that will be the death of us all if we allow him free will to enact his new policies." Dumbledore shook his head sadly. "You know me, Minerva. You know that the last thing I wish to do is interfere with our government . . ."

Minerva managed to turn her laugh into a cough. "As you say, Headmaster."

"As I was saying," Dumbledore cleared his throat. "The last thing I wish to do is interfere with our government, but I cannot stand by and do nothing while the world crumbles around us. I can not guarantee success, not after seeing the number of people the Minister has managed to bring to his way of thinking. No, no I can not guarantee victory even if we muster all our influence and oppose the Minister with every fiber of our being, but I can guarantee defeat if we do nothing. Are you with me, Minerva?"

"What is it that you expect me to do, Headmaster?" the old woman asked neutrally.

"I need you to gather your contacts and muster what influence you can to combat the Minister's disastrous policies," Dumbledore said, a look of resolve on his face. "It will not be an easy fight, but I believe it is a just one and our cause will win in the end."

"Yes, Headmaster," Minerva agreed, "exactly what policies are we blocking?"

"The most disastrous is the Minister's plan to do away with the hiring preference for purebloods," Dumbledore replied, "I do not believe that any of the man's other policies will be so far reaching and damaging as that one. If we are able to do nothing else, we must not allow the hiring preference to be removed."

"I fail to see what the problem is, Headmaster."

"Don't you realize what will happen if purebloods are not assured of finding employment upon graduation?"

"I suspect that more than a few of them will be motivated to study," Minerva said dryly, "a bit of competition is healthy."

"Minerva, if those Ministry jobs aren't given to purebloods then the Ministry will be forced to increase the number of halfbloods and muggleborn in critical positions," Dumbledore explained slowly, "think of what it will mean for our world."

"What exactly will it mean?" Minerva asked icily.

"I have nothing against muggleborn of course," Dumbledore said quickly, "but they lack the instinctual understanding of magical culture that purebloods are raised with. Oh they'll mean well of course, but they'll make changes, small ones at first but they'll grow and before we know it the magical world will be unrecognizable. The magic world can not adapt to change as readily as the muggle one can and even the muggle world is regularly thrown into chaos by the changes it spawns every generation! We can not allow that to happen, our duty to the world is to stop this nonsense before it has a chance to get started."

"Our duty to the world," Minerva hissed, "is to give the children the best education possible. To hell with so called Pureblood Society. I'm shocked to hear you speak like this, Albus."

"Minerva, you must understand that . . ."

"No," Minerva interrupted, "you must understand that I will have nothing to do with this foolishness." She paused. "And another thing, if you feel that the educational standards have slipped so badly then it is your responsibility as school Headmaster to improve them."

The Headmaster watched in numb shock as his deputy stormed out of the room. How was it that he was the only one burdened with the ability to see things clearly, he wondered to himself, why was it that he was always the one on which the fate of the world rested?

Albus sighed, with or without their help he would do all he could to save magical society. They'd thank him when they realized how high the stakes were, until then he'd just have to go it alone.

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Harry woke up with the sun the next day and rushed to the meeting place that they'd decided on the day before. He was several hours early for their rendezvous, but he decided that the wasted time would be more than worth it so long as he had the chance to spend even one extra minute with one of his friends.

"Good morning, Harry," Luna said softly, "lonely?"

"You too?"

"Me three," Susan announced as she stepped out of the shadows."

"And me four," Hermione agreed, "I'm not sure I could take being alone again."

"You don't know what you've got till it's gone," Harry repeated his thought from the night before, "and I didn't realize how lonely I felt until I had friends again."

"Yeah," the girls agreed.

"So what are we doing today?" Harry asked.

"Anyone on your list that needs a visit?" Hermione replied. "Kinda felt good to get back into the field again, eh' Susan."

"I'm still marveling at how good it feels to have legs again," Susan replied, "not all of us choose to lock themselves in a drafty old castle."

"As opposed to a dank research lab under the Ministry," Luna giggled, "at least I got out sometimes."

"So we should spend the day outside?" Harry ventured.

"Picnic in the park," Luna cheered, "we'll make something to eat then we'll go to the park and play on the swings."

"You ever had someone push you, Harry?" Hermione asked.

"Not in the last childhood," Harry admitted, "this one either come to think of it."

"It's settled then," Susan said firmly, "we'll act like normal children today."

"Agreed," the others chimed.

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Amelia frowned as she looked over an anonymous note written in Minerva McGonagall's handwriting that had been delivered to the duty Auror the night before. The note held news of what could become a major roadblock to the Minister's reforms. Amelia smiled ruefully, if asked even a month before, she'd have never believed that there was anyway that she, Amelia Bones, would become one of the Minister's strongest supporters.

"Course, it was a very different Minister we had then," she muttered to herself. Amelia rose from her desk and took three sharp steps to the fireplace, grabbed a handful of floo, and tossed it into the flames. "Office of the Wizarding Examination Authority."

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Luna happily led the group into her mother's kitchen and set about rummaging through the icebox and cupboards to see what they had on hand.

"How's it look?" Harry asked.

"It looks like you're going to need to go shopping," Luna replied, "I'll give you a list."

"Alright," Harry agreed. He was always happy to find an excuse not to be in the kitchen.

The girls wrote out a quick shopping list and sent Harry on his way.

"So," Susan turned to Luna and said after Harry had walked out the door, "I was wondering."

"Yes?" Luna replied.

"Do you know how to cook?"

"Not the slightest idea," Luna replied cheerfully, "but how hard can it be?"

"Yeah," Hermione agreed, "we are the three most brilliant witches of our generation."

Harry returned a few hours later to a scene of pandemonium. Smoke came out of the oven and there wasn't a single surface in the kitchen that wasn't covered in flour, batter, or some other formerly edible substance.

"None of you ever learned how to cook, I take it," Harry said dryly. His gaze swept over the flour covered girls.

"I always had the castle elves," Hermione said with a faint blush.

"Take out," Luna said absently. Her entire attention was focused on the mysterious black liquid that occupied the pitcher that was supposed to have held Hermione's attempt at lemonade.

"I enchanted my kitchen to do all the work," Susan added with a grin, "had trouble moving around without m'legs the first couple years."

"Well," Harry sighed, "let's get this cleaned up."

"Yeah," Luna agreed, "we wouldn't want Mummy to come home to this."

"Shame Dobby isn't around," Hermione mused, "I wonder what happened to the little guy."

"You is calling Dobby?" the little elf asked as he popped into the room.

"What are you doing here?" Harry blurted. "I thought you . . ." he trailed off, realizing that he was mixing his memories of the past future with the present past.

"Dobby has been following Harry Potter sir around ever since Harry Potter sir took care of the bad Malfoys," the little elf explained, "Dobby cleans up after Harry Potter sir."

"Cleans up after him?" Susan asked with a grin.

"Harry Potter sir is careless sometimes," the house elf reproached, "left a partial print on bad wizard in Prague and a hair in his flop house in Dubai and . . ."

"We get the picture," Harry interrupted, "thank you, Dobby."

"Harry Potter sir is thanking Dobby," he cheered, "Dobby is so happy."

"Would you be a darling and clean up this mess for us, Dobby?" Susan asked.

"And make us a picnic lunch. If it's not too much trouble of course," Hermione added.

"Dobby is allowed to clean up all this?" the little elf's eyes were shining. "And cook food for the great Harry Potter sir and his friends?"

"Yes," Luna said cheerfully, "Dobby is allowed to do all of that."

"Oh happy day." Dobby looked like he was about to burst.

"We'll just leave you to it then," Susan said as they left the room.

"Please be sure not to throw out the 'lemonade,' Dobby," Luna said happily, "I'd like a chance to analyze it later."

"Of course, Loveygood ma'am," Dobby agreed.

AN: Polish by dogbertcarroll, more thanks go to Drake. Typos busted by Skip. Title and disclaimer by ubereng. Dumbledore isn't evil, he's a product of his times and I'm trying to write into him the kind of unthinking bigotry that some of us have heard from grandparents, older acquaintances, etc. He doesn't see himself as a bigot, a fifty or a hundred years earlier and his attitude would be seen as quite progressive, times have changed and he hasn't.

## A Day at The Park

Dumbledore took the time to glance over the speech he'd prepared for the Wizengamot as he took his meal. Everything had to be absolutely perfect, he had to make them understand what they were preparing to unleash upon the world, had to make them understand that the very foundation of civilization itself was at stake.

"Tippy," Dumbledore called out.

"You is calling Tippy?" the little house elf asked after she'd popped in.

"Be sure that my formal blue robes are laid out," Dumbledore ordered, "and see to it that the fire in my office is hot and ready for travel."

"Yes, Headmaster sir," the elf agreed.

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Luna squealed happily as the swing paused at the height of its arc.

"Higher," she screamed, "push me higher." She'd never dreamed that swings could be so fun without charms to make them go, never dreamed how much better it was to have friends to do all the work in place of magic.

Harry grunted as he pushed Luna to give her a bit of extra thrust as she swung back.

"Jump," Susan called out as Luna rocked forward.

Luna giggled as she loosed her hold on the swing and flew through the air. She landed hard then glanced down at her blood covered knee for a couple moments before bursting into tears and running to the comforting embrace of her friends.

"What's wrong?" Harry asked as Luna threw herself into his arms and pushed her face into his shoulder.

"Someone's watching," Luna whispered.

"How do you know?" Hermione whispered as she joined the hug.

"Magical signature," Susan chipped in, "developed the charm to find it for the Aurors myself."

"And it's proved to be very useful over the years," Luna said in appreciation, "black dog next to the trash can."

"Snuffles?" Hermione said in shock. "He's supposed to be in the hospital."

"He did manage to escape from Azkaban," Harry pointed out, "St. Mungos shouldn't be too difficult for him."

"Someone we need to deal with?" Luna asked.

"Harry's godfather," Hermione explained.

The girls released their hold on Harry and he bent down ostensibly to inspect Luna's injury.

"Yep," Harry said quietly, "it's him." Harry raised his voice. "It's not so bad, Luna."

"It's not?" Luna asked in a shaky voice.

"No," Harry assured her. He puckered his lips and kissed it loudly. "There, all better."

"Thank you, Harry," Luna giggled, "what do you want to do now?"

"Jungle gym?" Hermione suggested.

"Good idea," Susan agreed.

"Do you think we're overdoing it?" Luna whispered as the group began walking towards the next bit of playground equipment.

"Sirius was never known for being subtle," Harry laughed.

"I, for one, enjoyed getting a chance to ham it up," Hermione added her two cents."

"Ham it up you did," Susan sniffed, "in comparison to my masterful performance, anyway."

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Aurora immediately noticed that something was wrong when Sirius didn't leap out of a place of concealment and grab her 'assets' the second she crossed the threshold into his room.

"Sirius," she called out nervously. A couple minutes of searching revealed that her intended was not hiding in any of the obvious places and she dismissed the less obvious places as too subtle for Sirius Black.

"Now where in the world..." she noticed that the medical monitors were all inactive. This meant Sirius was out of range. "Damn it. Why'd he escape?"

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Albus was deep in thought when he entered the Ministry of Magic and he allowed his feet to traverse the familiar path to the Wizengamot chambers.

"Move aside please," Albus told the Auror blocking the door, "I have a very important proposal to put fourth."

"The session has been delayed by a couple hours," the Auror said calmly, "I have orders to take you to Madame Marchbanks' office."

"Whatever for?" Albus asked with a frown.

"I could not say, Chief Wizard Dumbledore," the wizard replied, "all I know is the orders I've been given."

"Very well," Dumbledore said reluctantly, "lead the way."

"Yes, sir."

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Aurora glared down at the large, hairy, and seemingly innocent dog.

In response, the dog rolled over onto its back and its tongue lolled out between its teeth.

"You're not fooling anyone you know," Sinistra said sternly, "now change back the instant."

"Woof."

"If you don't change back, then I shall be forced to assume that you're just a normal dog and not my wayward fiancé," she continued.

This was met by an innocent doggy grin.

"And if you are just a normal dog, then it is my duty to see to it that you are neutered," she continued, "after all, it wouldn't do . . ."

Sirius had heard enough; he leapt to his feet and darted into the bushes to hide his transformation.

"Aurora," he said with a devastating smile, "fancy meeting you here."

"You're supposed to be in bed." She ignored his attempts to charm her. "What if you re-injured something?"

"You know me well enough to know that I'd spent as much time as I was going to cooped up in that damned bed," he said smoothly, "I wouldn't be the man you loved if I just let those nurses push me around."

"Here to watch your godson and his harem?" she sighed. "Don't you think that's a little odd?"

"I figured that watching from afar was slightly less creepy than walking up to the group and offering them candy," Sirius admitted. "The fact is that I just got out of prison and I'm uncomfortably aware of the sort of behavior that could send me back."

"Point," she admitted.

"Now then," he said as he slipped an arm around her waist, "would you care to join me?"

"I suppose I'd better," she said reluctantly, "just to make sure that you don't hurt yourself and to see to it that you get back to the hospital later."

"Of course," he agreed as he pulled her close, "do you think it would be possible to stop by my old house on the way back? There are couple things I'd like to pick up."

"I . . . I suppose," she agreed slowly.

"Wonderful," he whispered into her ear, "and perhaps while we're there . . ."

"Perhaps nothing," she interrupted, "a dusty old house is the least romantic setting I can think of."

"Of course," he said quickly, "I'm a bit hurt that you think so little of me, the thought never crossed my mind."

"Never?"

"Not once."

"Then what were you going to say?" she demanded.

"I was going to say that we might take a quick look at the house to see if it's worth salvaging or if we should sell it and build something new," Sirius said with a smile, "I want to have everything ready before the wedding."

"I . . . oh . . . I'm sorry, Sirius," she said contritely.

"Make it up to me?"

"How?"

"Perhaps one more side trip before we go back to the hospital," he said with a smile.

"Where?" Aurora asked suspiciously.

"Just to the Cauldron to get a decent meal," Sirius said innocently, "you know how bad hospital food is." And he knew that Ol'Tom would be willing to rent out rooms by the hour for the right price.

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Albus walked into the meeting and smiled at the group that had been assembled in Madame Marchbanks' office. He'd been sure that he'd have a tough battle ahead of him in the Wizengamot chambers but now, with the group assembled before him, he held the power to keep the status quo maintained for another century or more.

"Have a seat, Albus," Augusta Longbottom said in a neutral voice, "we all have something very important to discuss with you."

"Thank you," Albus said with a grin. "Now, I think the first thing we need to discuss . . ."

"Quiet, Albus," Tiberius Ogden barked. "We're not here to play your little games."

"What?" Albus asked, clearly puzzled. "I thought we were here to discuss the strategy we're going to take to prevent the new Minister's proposed reforms?"

"No, Albus. I think you misunderstand," Professor Toffy interrupted, "would you care to go first, Griselda?"

"I would," Griselda agreed, "thank you Toffy."

"Not at all," the man said grandly.

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Aurora was enjoying her conversation with Sirius when the man cut off and abruptly whirled around.

"There's something wrong," Sirius said intently.

"What is it?" Aurora asked, softly. She was more than a bit afraid that his time in Azkaban would have an effect like this.

"Where are the kids?" Sirius had a hint of panic in his voice.

"What?"

"They were over there just a minute ago," Sirius said quickly, "where are they now?"

"I . . . Sirius wait." She groaned in frustration when he turned into a dog and bound over to the last place he'd seen them. First hint of something resembling trouble and the idiot forgets he's a wizard. Come to think of it, had they ever gotten him a replacement wand? With a long suffering sigh, she cast a couple charms to locate the children to assure herself that everything was fine before setting off in pursuit of her disappearing grim.

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Dumbledore looked like he was about to vomit when he stumbled out of Madame Marchbanks' office and into the arms of the men that had been posted to guard the door.

"Are you alright, Chief Wizard?" one of the Aurors asked neutrally. It wasn't unheard of to find a senior member of the Ministry wandering the halls drunk as a lord.

"No," Dumbledore replied, "but I dare say that I know how to change that."

"Yes, sir," the guard agreed. It seemed like a safe reply.

"Take me to the Wizengamot chambers, please. I'm supposed to give an address and I wouldn't want to be late."

"Yes, Headmaster."

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Sirius' sensitive nose quickly picked up the trail of the missing children and, unmindful of his surroundings, he immediately set off in pursuit. He'd nearly had a heart attack when he'd found a number of tiny blood droplets in their trail. The Lovegood girl's skinned knee, he told himself, that's all it is. Too small to be anything serious.

Sirius rounded a corner and winced when a stream of icy cold water soaked him. He opened his mouth to bark a warning only to have it filled by what tasted like a bar of soap.

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Minerva was relaxing in her office when a nervous looking house elf popped in.

"Ms. Professy Kitty, Ma'am," the creature squeaked.

"Yes, what is it?"

"Board of Govinators is having a message for you."

"Oh?" Her pulse quickened. "What is it?"

Without another word, the creature handed over a sealed envelope.

"Thank you," she said as she took it. "You may go," she added as an afterthought.

The message simply stated that she'd been summoned to an emergency meeting of the Hogwarts Board of Governors regarding her future at the school.

'Can't get much clearer then that,' she thought fatalistically. It looked like Albus had decided that he could not keep a Deputy that did not share his view of the world. She checked the clock, if she hurried, she'd probably have enough time to get most of her office packed before her career ended.

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Aurora cast another charm to get Sirius' approximate location as she continued her slow pursuit. 'It was just like the old days,' she mused, Sirius would run off to do something ill-advised and she'd follow to pick up the pieces and laugh at whatever situation he'd gotten himself into.

She quickened her pace when a stream of panicked whines reached her ear. Whatever it was had to be bad; she'd never heard Sirius' dog form sound like that. Aurora's eyes were blazing as she leapt

around the corner to save her wayward fiancé and nearly dropped her wand at the sight that met her.

Her grim was covered with such a prodigious amount of suds that she could hardly see his black coat under all the bubbles. She giggled when he tried to make a break for it only to run into one of the three girls that seemed adept at cutting off all avenues of escape.

"Enjoying yourselves?" Aurora asked with a wide grin.

"Professor Sinistra?" Luna said in surprise. "What are you doing here?"

"Is this your dog, Professor?" Hermione asked sweetly.

"He's stinky so we decided to give him a bath," Susan added.

"Where's Harry?" Aurora asked. Might as well take the opportunity to set Sirius' mind at ease. She felt the tip of a wand dig into her lower back. How in the world had he managed to sneak through her perimeter charms?

"Stick 'em up," Harry's voice demanded.

"Of course," Aurora agreed, "what are you planning to do with me?" She glanced down out of the corner of her eye and was rewarded by a look of confusion on Harry's face. "Hadn't thought that far ahead?"

"No, Professor."

AN: Polish by dogbertcarroll and R.B.. Additional typos busted by Kai Korhonen, ubereng, jemknight2003, Tommy King, Chris Hill.

## Ransom

Dumbledore allowed the Auror to help him into his seat and spent the next few minutes in a daze. Having gone through the motions so many times before, he had no trouble performing the opening ceremonies on autopilot.

The Speaker stood up. "Order, order. First item on the agenda is a speech by the Chief Warlock Albus Dumbledore."

"Thank you Mr. Speaker, and thank you all for your time," Dumbledore said loudly. "I called this meeting to discuss a grave threat to our world, one I believed could spell the end for our way of life." Dumbledore took a deep calming breath. "I would like to begin by apologizing to you all, I was wrong."

The crowd erupted, Dumbledore ignored them. Just closed his eyes to wait for things to settle down.

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Aurora grinned as an idea formed. "Well, it's customary to demand ransom for the release of your captive."

"What's a captive?" Luna asked innocently.

"A prisoner," Hermione spoke up. "And ransom is when you get money to let them go."

"How about I buy ice cream for all of you?" Aurora suggested. "Then would you be willing to release me from durance vile?" The children's cheers told her what they thought of that idea.

"Come on," Susan demanded. "There's a booth over this way."

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Minerva steeled her resolve as she stepped into her meeting with the board of Governors. She'd been a teacher for her entire adult life, it had been her entire life. She tried to force a smile. What was she going to do now?

"Thank you for coming, Minerva," Augusta said cheerfully, "would you please take a seat."

"Of course," Minerva agreed, "thank you."

"Not at all." The old woman glanced down at her papers. "I suppose you're wondering why we called this meeting?"

"I am," Minerva admitted.

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The Chief Wizard opened his eyes when the noise settled to an acceptable level and looked over the impatient crowd.

"I find that my age is beginning to catch up to me," he joked. "The threat I spoke of is something many of you may fear, may be right to fear, but it is not one that should be addressed in these halls." The crowd leaned forward to hear his next words. "The threat I spoke of is change, as one grows older they often find themselves falling into set patterns and they . . . I felt uncomfortable, even frightened when those patterns were threatened with distraction. I was on the cusp of doing something foolish, something that could . . . something very foolish." The old man took a breath. "I am fortunate to have a set of very good friends that managed to make me see sense." He smiled widely. "So I would like to thank them, you were right, you were right and I am grateful to you beyond what words can express."

"Get to the point," one of the crowd demanded.

"Of course," Dumbledore agreed, "another failing of age is that it can sometimes cause one to ramble a bit." He paused for the laughter to die down. "Right, the point. Recent events have shown me that I can no longer be trusted to be as wise and objective as I once was. I therefore resign my position as Chief Warlock, I resign my position as Chief Wizard, I resign . . ." his voice caught. "I resign my position as Headmaster of Hogwarts, and I resign any other similar offices that I may have forgotten to mention. Thank you for your time." Dumbledore was grateful that his knees remained steady until after he'd taken his seat.

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A thought made its way into Harry's head as he enjoyed his frozen treat. This was probably the first time he'd ever had ice cream, chronologically anyway.

"You know," he said softly. "I really think we're getting better at this whole being children thing."

"I agree," Hermione whispered back. "All it took was a bit of research."

They both closed their mouths as Professor Sinistra and her 'dog' walked over. "What're you two talking about so seriously?" The woman asked.

"It's a secret," Harry said seriously. "I could tell you, but then I'd have to kill you."

Aurora giggled. "We can't have that." It was so nice to deal with children without the responsibility of having to teach them anything, and it was also an experience to get them a couple years before they usually came to her class. She was going to have to have a talk with Minerva later.

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Augusta smiled at the slightly younger woman. She had a good idea of what sort of nonsense was running through the Gryffindor Head's mind.

"We would like to offer you the position of Headmistress," Augusta announced, "please tell us that you accept."

"What?" Minerva gasped. "But . . . Albus . . ."

"Is the one that recommended you to us," Augusta interjected.

"I . . . yes." Minerva would be forever grateful that the board allowed her a few minutes to collect herself. "What about Albus?"

"Headmaster Dumbledore is going to." Dame Longbottom glanced at the clock. "Make that has, resigned every position of authority he once held."

"How did you convince him?" Minerva asked.

"His brother pointed out how similar Albus had gotten to their father," Augusta explained. "Albus was horrified when the comparison finally sunk in. One hundred years ago he was a wild eyed radical, fifty years ago he was a bit on the liberal side, twenty five years ago he was a bit conservative, and today . . ." the old woman trailed off. "Becoming too set in one's ways is a trap that many of us fall into. Living, as he did, in an Ivory tower insulated Albus from the changes."

"I see," Minerva sighed, "it must have been a terrible shock to him."

"We'd hoped to persuade him to stop his foolishness," Augusta agreed, "instead we persuaded him to release the reins of power."

"What will happen to him now?"

"We managed to convince him not to spend the rest of his years living in a cave as a hermit," Augusta said with a smile. "With your permission, he would like to remain at Hogwarts as an unpaid volunteer."

"Doing what?"

"He expressed an interest in teaching a class on pureblood culture and tradition, and he also mentioned that it might not hurt to add a class on alchemy."

"A couple more transfiguration classes wouldn't hurt either," Minerva mused, "he taught that subject before I took a position at the school."

"I'll trust you to work things out yourself," Augusta said with a wave. "Before we conclude this meeting, I feel that there is one thing that needs to be said."

"What is it?"

"Albus Dumbledore is no longer the Headmaster, he no longer holds a position of authority over you. If you feel that you can not see yourself giving him orders, then we will withdraw our offer right now. If in the future we find that you are unable to deal with having

Dumbledore on your staff, then we will retire you and find someone who can. Is that understood?"

"Of course," Minerva agreed.

"Wonderful," the old woman said with a smile. "Then it is with great pleasure that I bring this meeting to a close. Please allow me the honor of allowing me to be the first one to address you as Headmistress McGonagall."

"I . . . thank you," Minerva said with a wide grin. "I never expected to hold this position."

"Figured Albus would stay till his dying day like the rest of us did, eh?"

"Yes," Minerva confessed.

"Any thought on who you're going to pick as your deputy?"

"I was hoping that Filius would agree to it," Minerva replied.

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Aurora looked down at the children with a worried expression on her face.

"You're all sure you can make it back to Hermione's house without my help?" She asked for the fifth time.

"I live just down the street, Professor," Hermione said helpfully.

"And we've done it loads of times before," Harry added. "We're not babies."

"I didn't say you were," Aurora said smoothly. "You have your wands, right?"

"Yes, Professor," they agreed.

"Well . . . I suppose." It wasn't like they weren't left mostly to their own devices when they were at Hogwarts after all. "Just be careful."

"We always are, Professor," Susan said primly. "Aunt Amelia taught me how to take care of myself."

"And Susan taught the rest of us," Hermione chirped.

"On your way then," Aurora agreed finally. She waited till the children were on the other side of the park before shooting her fiancé a meaningful look.

"Woof," the dog agreed.

"I'll be waiting here when you get back," she said as he bound off to escort the children home.

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Dumbledore stepped into the Minister's office with a look of confusion on his face.

"You asked to meet with me?" Dumbledore asked softly.

"Yes," the Minister agreed, "please have a seat."

"I thought I made it clear that I no longer wished to take part in politics," Dumbledore ventured.

"You did," the Minister agreed, "and I am going to respect that. Sorry to see you go despite the fact that we didn't see eye to eye on several key positions. It's never a good idea for the the various branches of Government to get too cosy."

"Quite," Dumbledore agreed with a weak grin. "Then what can I do for you?"

"It's tradition for the Minister to ask the departing Chief Warlock to recommend their successor," the Minister explained.

"Oh, yes of course." Dumbledore paused to think for a few moments. "Amelia Bones."

"Any other recommendations? Amelia had indicated that she plans to retire at the end of the year."

"I can't think of anyone more qualified," Dumbledore said honestly, "and having her in the big seat would allow you time to search for someone else."

"Alright," the Minister agreed. "One more bit of business I'm afraid."

"Yes?"

"The foreign office has informed me that there are a number of requests for invitations to your retirement party."

"I wasn't planning on having one," Dumbledore admitted.

"It would be helpful if you did," the Minister said neutrally. "But I leave the decision to you."

"Thank you, may I have some time to think the matter over?"

"Of course."

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Sirius returned a few minutes later and transformed back into his original form.

"All safe and back at home," he said with a grin. "Now, what to I get as a reward for being such a good sort?"

"The satisfaction of knowing that your godson and his harem are safe," she said dryly.

"That'll do," Sirius said cheerfully. "Care to accompany me back to my family home?"

"Care to skip it today and go straight to the Cauldron for a decent meal?"

"As my lovely bride commands," Sirius agreed. He wasn't in any hurry to see the old place anyway, just wanted to get back long enough to salvage anything savable and put the rest of the place to the torch.

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Harry smiled when his tracking charms indicated that Sirius and his paramour had gone.

"We're clear," he said calmly.

"Nice house, Hermione," Susan said with a grin. "Who does it really belong to?"

"It's mine," Hermione replied absently. She looked up to see several expressions of shock. "What?"

"We just . . . well, we figured you were to paranoid to lead Sirius back to your real house," Luna explained. I know I would be if it weren't a matter of public record."

"Sirius is perfectly trustworthy," Hermione said firmly. "Besides, well . . . I may have confounded him so he couldn't find it again without one of us leading him here," Hermione admitted.

"That's our girl," Susan giggled.

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Sirius polished off the last of his meal and signaled Tom that he was ready for the bill.

"Charge it to my Gringotts account," Sirius said with a grin after Tom presented them with their check.

"You're joking, right?"

"Why would I be joking?" Sirius asked with a frown.

"Sirius hasn't gotten out much since he was found innocent," Aurora explained with a wince.

"First day out of St. Mungos," Sirius agreed. "Now, why would I be joking?"

"Gringotts folded," Tom explained. "Why don't we just say this meal is on the house, eh? It's the least I can do after thinking so many bad things about you over the years."

"Yeah," Sirius said distantly, "thanks, Tom." And there went his plan of renting a room for a few hours of personal time. "Looks like I'm broke." He grinned. "Guess I'm going to have to stay with you until the wedding."

"You've got ten years of back pay along with a substantial amount from your settlement," Aurora replied. "Nice try."

"Damn it. My silver lining's been tarnished."

"That's the way of things," Aurora said with a grin. "Now let's get you back to the hospital."

"Sure I couldn't stay with you?" Sirius asked hopefully. "Just for a few days?"

"I'm sure the Healers asked me to bring you back so you could check out."

"Check out?"

"They said if you're well enough to escape, then you're well enough to be an outpatient."

"I still need a place to stay," Sirius continued.

"And I've booked you a room at the Three Broomsticks," Aurora said.

"When'd you have the time to do that?"

"When you were playing fetch with the children."

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McGonagall was sitting in her office when she was disturbed by a hesitant knock on the door. "Come in."

"It's me, Minerva," Albus said softly. "May I come in?" He added nervously. Afraid that the witch would ban him from her office.

"Of course, please have a seat, Albus."

"Thank you, Minerva," the old wizard shuffled across the room and gently lowered himself into his chair. "It seems that you were right, Minerva. I'm nothing but an old fool, I . . . I thank you for doing what you could to stop me from doing something foolish."

"We all get set in our ways, Albus," Minerva said gently.

"May I ask if you've considered my request to be retained as an unpaid member of the staff?" Albus asked with a trace of hope in his voice.

"Of course," Minerva said quickly. "It'd be folly to dismiss an educator of your skills."

The former Headmaster let out a relieved sigh. "What classes would you like me to teach?"

"The details will need to be worked out later, but to start with I was thinking of giving you three courses."

"What subjects?"

"Transfiguration, Alchemy, and a course on . . . well, one of the Governors called it History and Moral Philosophy. Though I'm not sure that title fits."

"What of my course on pureblood culture?"

"I was thinking that the History and Moral Philosophy will cover that," Minerva said slowly. The old woman paused to think. "To be honest, so far as I'm concerned that course can be used to teach whatever you like. Teach culture one day, mix in a bit of history the next, and cover current events on the third day. You're an experienced enough educator, do what you like with it."

"How much time might I have to teach this class?" Dumbledore asked eagerly.

"I'm afraid it's only an elective course so . . ."

"Not much," Dumbledore interjected with a smile. "None the less, I shall make the most of the time I have."

"Do you mind covering a few study periods?" Minerva asked.

"What would my responsibilities be?"

"Helping with homework, that sort of thing. Once the homework is done then you might have a bit of extra time to cram some more lessons into their little skulls."

"Thank you, Minerva, I . . . I can't say how much this means to me."

"Save the thanks, Albus. As much as I respect you, as much as I wish there was more I could do to help. In the end, none of this is for your benefit. Everything I do is for the children, if I thought it would help their education to ban you from the castle then I would reluctantly do so. I'm giving you these opportunities because I think it will help the children grow into well rounded adults."

"Even better," Dumbledore replied. "The children are the reason the school is here after all."

"I'm glad we see eye to eye on this subject, Albus."

"Yes," Dumbledore agreed. "I can see how it would be awkward if we did not."

"Would you mind sending me your book list as soon as possible, Albus? I'd really like to arrange things with the bookshops as soon as possible."

"Of course, Minerva." The old wizard rose from his chair. "And on that note, if you'll excuse me, I have work to do."

"Of course, Albus. And don't hesitate to drop by, I've retained your open door policy and I'm sure you know how much of a relief it is to have an excuse to get away from paperwork." She laughed. "I'd thought it was bad as a deputy, not even a day into my new job and I'm already ready to pull my hair out."

"One of the few things I shant miss," Dumbledore laughed. "Good day, Minerva."

"Good day, Albus."

AN: Couldn't quite get this chapter where I wanted it, still can't but this is close enough. Thanks go to Earl Cauthridge. More go to polychromeknight for his constructive criticism.

Omake by: Michael Bennett

Addressing the Wizengamot

"It is nothing like that," Dumbledore replied. "Purebloods have less chances to find employment, due to the fact that they can not survive in the muggle world. Muggleborn and most halfbloods can live in either world, so employment is much easier to find. By removing the current protocols of employment for the Ministry, this erases a number of jobs that Purebloods can actually take." Albus took a deep breath, "It would be even worse if we forced the removal of these protocols of employing Purebloods first by all businesses, due to the sole fact that so many muggleborn and halfbloods would rush to steal these positions that soon Purebloods will be left unemployed. This would lead our economy and culture to ruin, and possibly our world, as the wealth Purebloods contain disappears due to the lack of employment."

Dumbledore looked over a sea of unreadable faces, "Then we have the fact that Muggleborns and some halfbloods do not understand the customs and traditions of the magical world. If Purebloods were no longer the majority in the Ministry, we would lose our history all because 'things do not make sense' from the point of view of a muggle. The muggle point-of-view is so fickle, they change their own rules so much that one never really knows what is legal or illegal in their world now. Why, the muggles still rule that it is illegal to eat mince pies on Christmas Day."

"As I said before," Dumbledore stated sadly, "Muggleborn can live in either world so employing them after Purebloods causes them no harm. Purebloods are stuck in the magical world, denying them employment causes great harm to them and to the entire world of Wizards."

## Christmas

Hermione woke up early, as was her habit, so that she could meet up with her friends.

"Just where do you think you're going?" her mother's amused voice asked, stopping Hermione in her tracks.

"To meet up with Harry and Luna and Susan," Hermione replied. "Like I do every day."

"Not today," her mother said calmly.

"Why not?" Hermione demanded.

"Look at the calender," her mother suggested. "It's Christmas eve and you're going to spend it with your family."

"I'm going to spend it with my friends too," Hermione insisted.

"Honey, I . . ."

"You said you wanted to meet them," Hermione persisted. "Now you can, their families too."

"They probably have other plans and it's . . ."

"I'll go ask," Hermione interrupted. "Be right back, mum." Hermione darted out the door.

"Rude to interrupt their holiday," her mother finished weakly, wondering when she'd lost her little girl.

At the same moment, two other girls were having two very similar meetings with their families with two very similar results.

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Harry was alone on Christmas eve. It didn't bother him, he'd spent nearly every holiday and birthday alone, so he was used to it.

The thing that did bother him was the loneliness, he was used to that too, but it had never bothered him before as he'd never really known anything else.

He glanced at the calendar. He expected the girls to spend today, tomorrow, and the day after with their families, then he could have his friends again, then the world wouldn't seem so empty.

"Are you here, Harry?" Luna's voice called out.

"Luna?" Harry called back. "What are you doing here?"

"Getting you," Luna replied honestly. "You didn't think I would let you spend the holidays alone, did you?"

"I figured you wanted to spend it with your family," Harry replied.

"I do," Luna chirped. "But you, Hermione, and Susan are as much my family as mother and father are."

"Couldn't agree more," Susan said as she walked in. "Where's Hermione?"

"She lives a bit further away," said Luna, with a smile. "It'll take her a bit longer to get here."

"Why don't you send a letter to Sirius while we're waiting?" Susan suggested. "That way we can all be ready to go when Hermione gets here."

"Go where?" Harry asked.

"I think I probably have the biggest house," Susan offered. "Unless you have a ballroom in that chess piece of yours, Luna."

"I don't believe we do," Luna said thoughtfully. "Unless father's decided to build another addition without telling anyone." Something that happened more frequently than one might think.

"I also have house elves," Susan added. "And they'll love to get a chance to cook for everyone."

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Sirius awoke to someone nibbling on his chin. "Aurora you naughty witch," he mumbled. "Ready for round two."

"Hoot," the disgruntled owl bit harder.

"Could'ha le'me sleep another damned minute," Sirius grumbled. "Dream was just starting to get good."

"Hoot." The owl presented it's leg.

"What do we have here?" A smile bloomed on Sirius' face as he read the invitation. "Just a sec," he told the owl. Sirius jotted down two quick notes. "First one's for whoever's at the bar telling them to stuff you full of bacon till you can barely fly. Second is my RSVP."

"HOOT!" the owl cheered.

Sirius threw on his good robes and skipped up to the castle to fetch his beloved. Today had the makings of a very good day.

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Amelia Bones was having a rather odd Christmas. First her niece had disappeared and then she'd gotten three owls accepting her invitation to a party that she hasn't known she was throwing.

"That girl and I are going to have a long talk later," Amelia muttered to herself.

Her first two guests announced their arrival a minutes later with a knock on the door. They were a rather confused muggle couple that didn't seem to know how to react to the whole situation.

"I . . . we're Hermione's parents," the woman said slowly.

"I'm Susan's aunt," Amelia replied. "Do you mind telling me how the two of you managed to get here?" Something that should have been impossible given the number of wards she had up.

"The invitation dragged us here," the man replied. "And I hope to god you've got another way for us to get home."

"A portkey then," Amelia sighed. "Well . . . that answers one question and leaves us with another."

"What's that?"

"Who in the hell charmed those bloody portkeys and how did they get through my wards," Amelia replied.

"This note came with our invitation," Hermione's mother said hesitantly, handing it over to Amelia.

"List of vulnerabilities in my ward scheme," Amelia muttered. "Signed with a blot of black ink," she added with a grin, another piece that seemed to confirm Moody's theory. "Forgive my rudeness, Amelia Bones."

"Phil and Jane Granger," the other woman introduced herself. "Sorry we're not dressed up but we didn't have much notice that there was going to be a party."

"Neither did I," Amelia replied. "It seems the children decided to set all this up themselves."

Luna's parents arrived on the heels of the Grangers.

"Amelia," Selene Lovegood said with a smile. "So good of you to invite us."

"Afraid I can't take all the credit," Amelia said with a matching grin. "Glad you two could come."

"Sirius and Aurora coming next?" Selene asked.

"I would assume so," Amelia agreed.

"Assume?"

"Like I said, I'm afraid I can't take all the credit."

"Ah." Selene glanced around the room. "I don't suppose you know where the children disappeared off to?"

"Afraid not," Amelia sighed. "It was so much easier when I could lock her in the crib."

"I always found it was a constant battle to keep Hermione in hers," Jane joined the conversation. "Little brat was always escaping to cause trouble."

Sirius arrived a couple minutes later wearing a gaudy green polyester leisure suit, a pair of platform shoes, slicked back hair, and towing his mortified fiancée.

"Let's get funky!" the ex-con declared loudly.

"They say prison changes a man," Aurora sighed, hiding her face in her hands. "If only that were true."

"Where's Harry?" Sirius asked eagerly, looking around for his godson.

"Trying to sneak in through the backdoor with the girls," Amelia replied, having been notified by the wards.

"Come on," Sirius demanded. Every second spent not running towards the backdoor was a second he didn't get to spend with his godson.

"Why couldn't I have fallen for someone else?" Aurora lamented. "Anyone else?"

"We're just lucky I guess," Selene consoled the other woman, shooting a long-suffering look at her husband who was staring at his left hand with a look of utter fascination.

"How many fingers are you supposed to have on your left hand?" he asked intently.

"Five," Selene replied.

A look of horror appeared on her husband's face. "I've got four and a thumb," he said in distress. "Do you think someone hit me with a curse?"

"The thumb counts as a finger," Selene sighed.

"How can it be two things at once?" he demanded. "The logical explanation is that I was hit by a curse. We'll have to go to St. Mungos to get it reversed after the party.

Selene closed her eyes and counted to ten, hopefully he'd be distracted by something later and forget the whole thing. The last thing she wanted to do was to try to explain things to the staff at the hospital, again.

Selene opened her eyes. "I think . . ." she cut off when Sirius returned with the four children in tow. "That we had better see why our daughter set up this gathering," she said firmly.

"Hmmmm?" he looked up, distracted from the staring contest he was engaged in with his right hand. "Whatever you think is best, dear."

"I'd like to know that as well," Amelia spoke up. "Well, Susan?"

"We invited them here because you'll all be neighbors soon if everything goes well," Susan explained. "We've been offered a rather intriguing research opportunity and we'd like to have our families close enough to make weekend visits."

"Where exactly is this research opportunity?" Selene Lovegood demanded. She glanced down at her daughter. "And why haven't you told us any of this?"

"Hmmm?" Luna regarded her mother curiously. Her head turned to make eye contact with her father. "We're moving to Australia in a couple months, father, please have everything packed in time."

"Alright, aconite," the addled man agreed. "Should I sell the house now, or should we keep it as a vacation home?"

"I . . ." Selene squeezed her eyes shut and slowly counted to ten, she should have known. This is what she got for marrying a Lovegood. "We'll talk about it later, darling."

"Okay, mummy," Luna agreed.

"This is what you were talking about?" Jane Granger asked.

"It was, mum," Hermione agreed. "None of us like being away from you all when we're at Hogwarts. If we take this opportunity, we'll be able to visit when we can get time away from our research."

"What type of research are you doing?"

"Proprietary," Hermione replied firmly. "Sorry, mum."

To each child's delight, their parents and assorted adults all got along marvelously. One more obstacle cleared from their objective.

It didn't take long before Harry and the girls were able to excuse themselves for a bit of private time, thanks to their age, none of the adults thought anything about letting the children go off on their own.

"Harry," Hermione began. "We've got something we'd all like to speak with you about."

"What is it?"

"It's about the Goblins," Luna offered.

"What about 'em?"

"We've been talking," Hermione picked up again, "and we really don't think that reducing them to managing a storage space is enough."

"What do you suggest then?" Harry's grin grew wider as the girls explained their plan. "I really love you girls, you know that don't you?"

Susan smiled at the heartfelt comment. "Now that we've got that settled, what does everyone think of Dumbledore's retirement?"

"Figured they'd have to drag him out of Hogwarts kicking and screaming," Harry said honestly. "Never believed the old man would give it up willingly."

Hermione nodded. "Agreed, hate to admit that I misjudged him. Doesn't forgive all the annoying things he was responsible for, but it does mitigate them somewhat."

"Aunt Amelia tells me that there may be a retirement party," Susan said, revealing the real reason she'd brought the whole thing up. "And if he does, it presents with an opportunity to get the world's sole surviving Death Eater." Susan smiled. "The Headmaster of one of Europe's three premiere magic schools wouldn't dream of missing a fellow Headmaster's retirement party after all."

"And it'll get him out from behind the protection of his school's wards and where we can easily get him," Luna added. "It'd be a shame not to make a clean sweep of things."

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Downstairs, the adults were having a meeting of their own.

"What do you think of this 'research opportunity' the children were talking about?" Aurora asked.

"It isn't the first one Hermione has been offered," Jane spoke up.

"Or the first one she's accepted that she couldn't talk about," Phil added. "Perils of having a child prodigy."

"Do we have any way of finding out who's offering it?" Selene murmured. "Or rather, do we have any way of confirming our suspicions, Amelia?"

Every eye turned to regard the Director of Magical Law Enforcement. "I believe that the recent spate of misfortune experienced by the 'imperious' Death Eaters was the work of one of Lily Potter's cousins. He's been sending Susan spell creation manuals."

"He also saved my life," Selene said. "And set up a trust fund for Luna."

"How do you know it's one of Lily's cousins behind this?" Sirius asked.

"We don't, it's just what fits the available evidence."

"Was he the one that took care of the rat?" Aurora inquired.

"We believe so."

The woman sighed. "We can't say no if that's the case, Sirius. Not unless the man proves to be a danger to the children."

"We owe him too much," Sirius agreed.

"As do we," the head of the Lovegood family said firmly, gone was any trace of his usual distracted demeanor.

"Neighbors?" Amelia asked with a grin.

AN: Polish by dogbertcarroll. Typos busted by siaru74. I'm not too happy with how this turned out, but I figured it was better to finish it and get on with the next chapter than waiting another six months for an update.

CHP18